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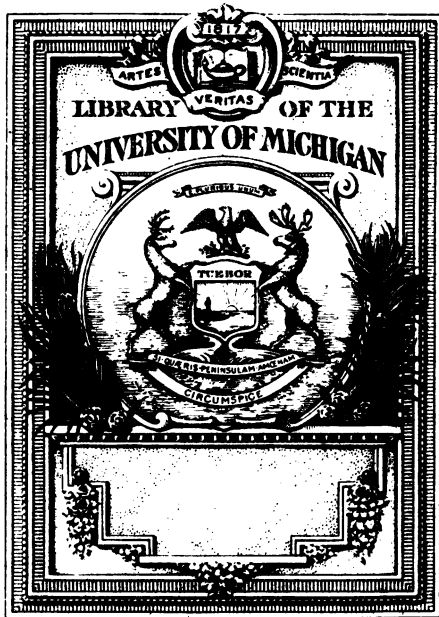
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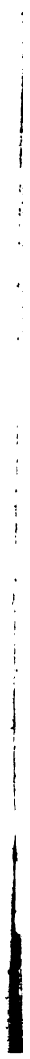
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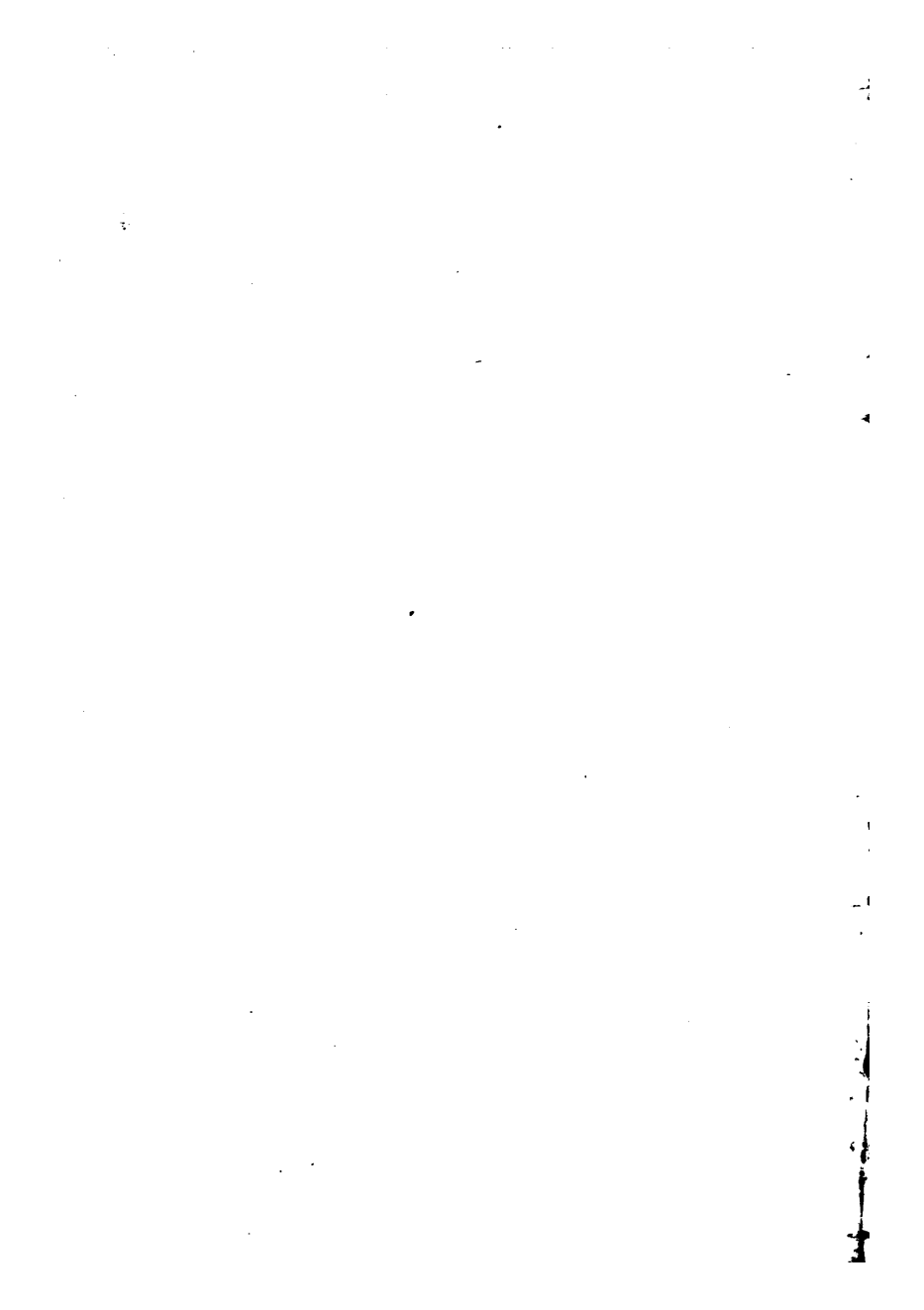




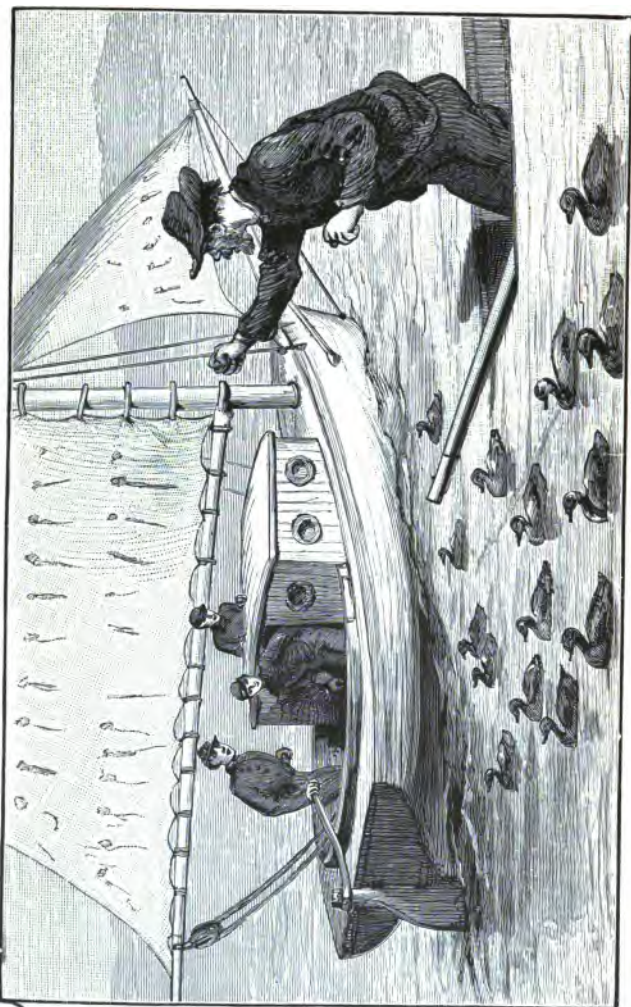


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THE ANGRY DUCK-HUNTER.

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Charles Austin

Fosdick, Charles Austin

ROD AND GUN SERIES.

THE
YOUNG WILD-FOWLERS.

By HARRY CASTLEMON,
AUTHOR OF "THE GUNBOAT SERIES," "BOY TRAPPER SERIES,"
"ROUGHING IT SERIES," ETC.



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THE YOUNG WILD-FOWLERS.

CHAPTER I.

AT EGAN'S HOME.

“**W**HAT was that noise, Bert?”

Don Gordon raised his head from his pillow, and supporting himself on his elbow, looked out at the open window toward the surf that was rolling in upon the beach, and listened intently.

It was a clear, cold night in October. The fresh breeze that came in through the window from the bay made blankets comfortable, but neither Don nor Bert would consent to have the windows of their sleeping-room closed. This was the first night they had ever passed within sight of salt water, and they wanted the waves to sing them to sleep. In company with Egan and Curtis they had been spending a few weeks with their fat crony, Hopkins, while awaiting the arrival of

the water-fowl, which generally make their appearance in numbers in the northern waters of the Chesapeake, about the middle of October. They had ridden to the hounds, and shot quails and snipes until they were tired of the sport, and this particular night found them at Egan's home, impatiently waiting for a chance at the far-famed canvas-backs.

They had been there but a few hours, having arrived just at supper-time. Egan's father and mother extended a most cordial greeting to them, and Mr. Egan, who, as we know, was an old soldier, and who never grew weary of hearing Gus (that was the ex-sergeant's Christian name) tell about that fight at Hamilton Creek Bridge, would not let the visitors go to bed until he had heard their description of it.

Knowing that her son's guests would want to see all they could of salt water during their stay in Maryland, Mrs. Egan had furnished for their especial benefit a large back room, which looked out upon the bay, and supplied it with beds enough to accommodate them all. Here, when night came, they could lie at their ease and talk over the day's exploits until the music of the surf

lulled them to sleep. On the night in question their tongues had run with amazing swiftness and persistency until nearly twelve o'clock ; then they began answering one another in monosyllables, and finally Don Gordon, who was the last to stop talking, placed his pillow in the open window, in front of which his bed stood, laid his head upon it, and was fast losing himself in dream-land, when suddenly a sound like a single peal of distant thunder came to his ears, and brought him back to earth again.

“Are you all asleep in there ?” exclaimed Don, drawing in his head, and speaking to nobody in particular. “What was that ?”

“What was what ?” asked Egan, drowsily.

“Why, that noise I heard just now. It sounded something like the report of a cannon.”

“Well, it wasn't a cannon ; it was a duck-gun,” replied Egan.

“Oh !” exclaimed Don. “Those poachers are at work, are they ?”

“Yes ; and you will probably hear that gun a good many times during your stay, if you take the trouble to listen for it,” said Egan. “It is harvest-time with these pot-hunters now, and in a

few days they will make the ducks so wild that you can't get within rifle-shot of them."

"We don't have any market-shooters in my State—or at least in the county in which I live—and I am very glad of it," said Don. "Why don't the farmers who live along these shores wake up, and put a stop to this night-hunting by capturing the guns? I suppose it would put the poachers to some trouble to get others?"

"Well—yes; and to some little expense also," replied the ex-sergeant. "How much do you suppose one of those big guns cost?"

Don replied that he had no idea, having never seen one of them.

"I saw one last summer that cost six hundred dollars in England," continued Egan. "It was captured by a detective who was sent here by some Baltimore sportsmen. You see, some of the rich men who live in that city, and in New York and Philadelphia, pay high prices for the exclusive use of a portion of these ducking shores, and they get mad when the market-shooters come around with their howitzers, and scare all the birds away to other feeding-grounds."

"I don't blame them for getting mad," said Don.

"Neither do I. If a man pays four or five hundred dollars a year for a shooting privilege, it is because he thinks he and his friends will have some sport out of it."

"You don't mean to say that these shores rent for any such sum as that!" exclaimed Don.

"Don't I, though?" replied Egan. "Father has been importuned time and again to lease his shores to different clubs, and he might as well make five hundred or a thousand dollars a year as to let it alone; but he likes to shoot as well as anybody, and he likes to see his visitors enjoy themselves, so he keeps his ducking-points for his own use."

"Do the big-gunners ever trouble you by shooting over your grounds?"

"Not to any great extent. You see the ducks don't bed in these narrows; they want plenty of elbow-room."

"What do you mean by 'bed'?" inquired Don.

"Why, when the ducks gather in large flocks and sit on the water, either during the day-time or at night, they are said to 'bed' or 'bunch.'

When a market-shooter finds one of these beds in the bay, he watches it to see that it does not break up, and when darkness comes to conceal his movements, he goes out and shoots into it. He sometimes gets as many as eighty ducks at a single discharge of his blunderbuss."

"How large a load does that blunderbuss carry?"

"Half a pound of powder and two pounds of shot."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Don. "How heavy is it?"

"The one I saw weighed a hundred and sixty pounds," replied Egan. "It was ten feet long."

"There ought to be a law prohibiting the use of such weapons," said Don, indignantly.

"There is a law which says that you not only shall not use them, but that you must not have them in your possession," answered Egan. "If you violate that law, you render yourself liable to a fine of two hundred dollars or imprisonment; but who is there about here who is going to complain of you?"

"Why, the men who own these shores," replied Don.

"They dare not do it," said Egan.

"Well, I would do it if I lived here," declared Don, with a good deal of earnestness.

"Then you would find yourself in trouble directly. These big-gunners are a desperate lot of men, the first thing you know, and they will not submit to any interference in their business."

"If the law says they shan't follow that business, I don't see how they are going to help themselves," said Don.

"They can take revenge on any one who incurs their displeasure, can't they? They can and they will. If a person renders himself obnoxious to them, the first thing he knows some of his buildings will go up in smoke, or his boats will be smashed, or the rigging of his yacht cut, or his oyster-bed will be fouled. Why, they don't hesitate to make a fight with the police, if they are surprised at their business. That Baltimore detective, who worked his way into their good graces and joined them in their night excursions, said that the smack he went out in was as thoroughly armed as any little pirate."

"I'd like to go out with them just once in order to see how they operate," said Don, in whom the

love of adventure was as strong as it ever had been. "They must see plenty of excitement."

Egan, who was more than half asleep, replied that they probably did, especially while they were dodging the police boats ; but he did not believe that his friend Don would ever learn by personal observation how the big-gunners conducted their business. Well, he didn't ; but there were others of our characters who did, and who they were, and how they came to be permitted to accompany the poachers on one of their nocturnal expeditions, shall be told further on.

Don would have been glad to hear more of the big-gunners, but a gentle snore coming from the other side of the room told him that Egan had gone to sleep again ; so he rearranged his pillow and prepared to go to sleep himself.

The morning dawned bright and clear, and with just enough frost in the salt air to make it invigorating, and to send the blood coursing through one's veins with accelerated speed. The visitors, who had not been given much opportunity to look about them the night before, were up at the first peep of day, and their host led them out to show them what there was to be seen. As he opened

the door and stepped upon the porch, he was greeted by four large, shaggy dogs, which fawned upon him with every demonstration of delight, but showed their white teeth to the other boys when they attempted to scrape an acquaintance with them.

"They are as ugly in disposition as they are homely in appearance," said Curtis. "Egan, why do you keep such worthless brutes about you?"

"They are not worthless," answered the ex-sergeant. "They would sell to-day for two hundred dollars apiece to any one of a dozen men whose names I could mention."

"What makes them so valuable?" asked Curtis. "They don't look as though they are worth feeding."

"I know they are not handsome, but they are very useful," replied Egan. "They are called Chesapeake Bay dogs, and they belong to a breed that are considered to be the best retrievers in the world. You don't need a boat to pick up your wounded ducks when you have one of these fellows in the blind with you, and neither do you have to tell him when to go out after a bird. If you kill half a dozen ducks and wound one, he

will swim straight through the dead ones and take after the wounded one ; and he'll have it, too, before he comes back to the shore. That one," continued Egan, pointing to the largest of the dogs, "once swam more than three miles through floating ice in pursuit of a wing-tipped canvas-back. Father was in the blind with me, and he was so very much afraid that he was going to lose the dog, that he sent me out in a boat to pick him up. When I overtook him he had the bird, and was striking out for the shore, apparently none the worse for his long cold swim. Dogs of this breed are very enduring while they last, but in the end they are laid up with rheumatism, just as a man would be who spent his life as they do. Now, come with me, and I will show you the swiftest and handiest little boat on the bay. I call her a cutter for short, and that is what almost every one else calls her ; but she isn't a cutter—she's a yawl."

The boys followed their host along a broad walk, through an extensive and well-kept flower-garden which, in the proper season, must have been one solid mass of bloom, and down to a little stream that flowed into the bay a short distance

from the house. On the bank they found a snug boat-house, which was used as a place of storage for two or three canoes, oyster-dredges, lobster-pots, and various other things which none of the visitors, except Hopkins, knew the use of. One of the canoes having been shoved into the water, the boys got into it, and pushed off toward a couple of little vessels that were riding at anchor in the bay. One of them was an oyster-boat—Don and Bert were sure of that, for in rig and model she corresponded with the descriptions they had read of such vessels; but the other one puzzled them. She was not a sloop, for she had two masts; and yet she was not a schooner, because the mizzen mast, if that was the proper name for it, was stepped close to the stern. But she was a beautiful little vessel they found when they boarded her, and very roomy, too, although she was only seventeen feet in length, with five feet beam. She had a house or hatch on deck, which proved to be the top of the cabin, and a small cock-pit, in which the boy who managed the helm stood or sat while he steered the vessel. The cabin was spacious, owing to the deep, straight sides of the boat, and was provided with two

berths, one on each side, which could be turned up against the bulk-head, or let down at pleasure, like the berths in a sleeping-car. Behind the foremast, which came down through the forward end of the cabin, was the alcohol stove, on which the captain and owner cooked all his meals while he was cruising about the bay—that is, when he didn't feel in the humor to go ashore to cook them, or couldn't get ashore on account of the surf. There were two water-tanks, plenty of lockers in which to stow food, clothing, and hunting and fishing accoutrements—in short, she seemed to be perfect in every particular; and Don and Bert, who, as we know, took almost as much delight in a sail-boat as they did in their ponies, were prompt to say so.

“Yes, I am rather proud of her, because she was built according to my own ideas of what a boat for single-handed cruising ought to be,” said Egan, as he led the way out of the cabin, and seated himself in the cock-pit. “First and foremost, you can't capsize her. If the Mystery had been built after this model she would have weathered that gale without shipping so much as a bucket of water.”

(It will be remembered that the *Mystery* was a yacht belonging to Mr. Packard, a brother of Judge Packard, who was General Gordon's nearest neighbor. Accompanied by his wife and child, and two or three friends, the *Mystery's* owner set sail from Newport for Bridgeport, but was overtaken on the way by a terrific storm, which wrecked his yacht, and sent her to the bottom. Her entire crew would have gone with her, had it not been for the fact that Enoch Williams and his crowd of deserters, who had run away in the *Sylph*, were close at hand. Enoch and Lester Brigham went off in a small boat, and saved the yacht's crew at the risk of their own lives, and when they were captured by Captain Mack and his men, who were following close in their wake in the schooner *Idlewild*, and taken back to the academy under arrest, they were looked upon as heroes rather than culprits. Their act of bravery did not, however, save them from a court-martial. They lost every one of the credit marks they had earned during the term, and that took away their last chance for promotion. Egan and his friends could recall all the incidents connected with the wreck and the rescue,

and they became excited whenever they thought of them.)

“What do you mean by ‘single-handed cruising’?” asked Curtis, continuing the conversation which we have for the moment interrupted. “Can one person handle this boat in all kinds of weather?”

“Certainly; and there is where the beauty of her rig shows itself. If I want to beat in or out of a narrow channel I run up the mainsail only, and then she works like a cat-boat, never missing stays, but keeping her headway clear around. If I am caught out in a gale, I drop the mainsail, and scud along under the jib and mizzen. I have stayed out on the bay alone, fooling around, when boats that were twice as big as this were running for shelter. I expect to lose her some day, but it will be through no fault of my own.”

“What do you mean by that?” asked Bert.

“Why, I am accused of having assisted that detective in running those big-gunners to earth last fall,” answered Egan. “I didn’t do it, but some of their friends saw me talking with the detective on several different occasions, and they know that I detest their business, for I have often

said so when perhaps I ought to have kept my tongue still. It is very plain that somebody gave the detective all the information he wanted, and, as I said, these poachers lay it to me. They have sent me word that they intend to get even with me, and that's why I expect to lose my boat."

"Can't you head them off in any way?" asked Don, whose chivalrous nature revolted at the mere mention of so cowardly a way of "getting even." "You are not obliged to stand still and see your property destroyed."

"Of course not, and I don't intend to do it, either," said Egan, in very decided tones. "These boats are guarded every night, and have been for a year. One of our darkies sleeps on board the oyster-boat, and he has two of the retrievers and a loaded musket for company. It will be a cold season when those dogs get left, for they are all ears and nose, and would rather fight than eat when they are hungry. Now, perhaps, we had better go ashore. Breakfast will be ready directly, and then we will take a run down the bay, unless you can think of something else you would rather do."

The boys hastened to assure their host that

they couldn't think of anything that would afford them so much pleasure as a sail in his neat little cutter, and so one day's sport was provided for. We may run far enough ahead of our story to say that they thoroughly enjoyed their boat-ride, but whether or not they saw any fun in some things that followed close upon the heels of it, is another matter altogether.

Having drawn the canoe high and dry upon the beach, the boys went into the house and up to Egan's room, which contained his small but well-chosen library, his hunting and fishing outfit, and a few specimens of his skill as a sportsman and cabinet-maker ; for Egan understood the use of tools, and spent every stormy day when at home in his shop. Prominent among his specimens was a magnificent white swan which, after being so badly wounded that it could not take wing, had led him a two hours' chase in the teeth of a fierce gale, and through water covered with huge cakes of ice, that every now and then were thrown by the waves against the sides of his yacht with force enough to make her tremble all over.

"I had a jolly time, but a wet one," said Egan, whose eyes sparkled with excitement when he

spoke of the circumstance. "But didn't father scold me when I came ashore? Well, I deserved it, for it was a careless trick, going out in all that wind and ice when not another boat would venture away from the shore; but I wanted the swan, and I desired to test my yacht, which had come into my possession only a week before, and that was the reason I did it. By the way," added Egan, pointing to something which, enclosed in a frame of his own construction, hung suspended from the swan's long, white neck, "do you know what that is?"

Yes, the boys knew what it was as soon as they looked at it. It was the five dollar bill that the paymaster had given him for the part he had borne in putting down the Hamilton riot. Every boy who was in that fight had received the same amount, and they had one and all declared that nothing could induce them to spend a cent of it; but the pancakes at Cony Ryan's proved to be too strong a temptation for some of them to resist, and our five friends were among the very few who had held to their resolution.

Breakfast being over and a substantial lunch provided, the boys returned to the cutter, which had

been christened the "Sallie" by her proud captain and owner. Hopkins declared that she was named after Asa Peters' sweetheart—the one he had intended to take to the show on the day that Don and Egan borrowed his clothes; but the indignant master of the yacht affirmed that there wasn't a word of truth in it, adding that if he had been going to name his boat after anybody's girl, he would have named her after his own, who was by all odds the very handsomest one in America.

Having stowed their guns and cartridge-belts away in one of the lockers, the boys went on deck to get the yacht under way. Egan was the only sailor in the party, but the others, who, during their cruise in the Idlewild in pursuit of Enoch Williams and his band of deserters, had learned to tell a halliard from a down-haul, were able to give him considerable assistance, and in a very few minutes the Sallie was flying down the bay with all her canvas set except the big topsail, which her cautious captain did not think she could stand, seeing that there was no boat for her to race with, and no wing-tipped swan scudding along in front of her.

Being fairly under way, the boys began amusing themselves as live boys generally do when they are entirely satisfied with themselves and their surroundings—by singing songs and telling stories. Egan, who stood at the helm, was roaring out (with little regard to time and melody, it must be confessed), "I'm going to fight mid Zeigle," when, just as he was saying that he would like to have "sweitzer kase and pretzel" for rations rather than "salty pork," the Sallie shot around a low point which jutted out into the bay, and bore swiftly down upon what appeared to be an immense flock of canvas-backs and red-heads. They were floating about among the waves with their heads erect, as if they were on the point of taking wing, while about two hundred yards farther down the bay, approaching on rapid pinion, was another and much larger flock, which was already beginning to "swing" as if preparing to alight among the ducks on the water.

"Great Scott!" cried Don, making a headlong rush for the companion ladder. "Why didn't I bring my gun up with me?"

"Well, that is rich!" exclaimed Egan, with a hearty laugh. "I thought you had hunted ducks

often enough to know the difference between a live bird and a decoy. Don't you see that sink-box right in the midst of them?"

Yes, Don saw it, after he had taken another and a closer look, and he saw too that the objects which he had at the first glance mistaken for canvas-backs and red-heads, were wooden counterfeits, so closely resembling live birds in form and coloring that almost anybody, except an expert, would have been deceived.

The approaching flock changed its course as soon as the yacht rounded the point, and having seen them well started on their way toward the middle of the bay, Don turned to look at the sink-boat. It was in reality a floating blind—an anchored box with hinged flaps to keep the waves from washing into it. When these sink-boats are used the gunner lies on his back completely out of sight, and shoots into the passing flocks as they swing to his decoys. The birds he kills are picked up by a confederate, who also skirmishes around in his canoe, putting up every flock he can find, and trying to start them toward the gunner. If the latter has all the sport, he likewise has the hardest part of the work to perform. It is drown-

ing work when the sea comes up suddenly and fills his box full of water before his companion in the canoe can get him out of it ; it is freezing work when the wind chops around to the north and drives the rain and sleet before it with cutting force ; it is uncertain work when that same wind drives the ducks off shore to the open waters of the bay ; and it is tiresome and unpleasant owing to the cramped position the gunner is compelled to occupy. But, as a general thing, he shoots plenty of birds, and those he doesn't shoot he frightens away so that no one else can shoot them.

As Don looked at the sink-boat he saw the occupant's head rise slowly above the side of it. He gazed in every direction to see what it was that had frightened the flock for which he had been so long and patiently waiting, and which he had hoped would alight among his decoys, and finally he turned his face towards the yacht. It was a very savage looking face, thought Bert, who was gazing at it through Egan's binoculars, and that the owner of it felt savage was made evident by the first words he uttered.

CHAPTER II.

THE MAN IN THE SINK-BOAT.

WHEN the man in the sink-boat discovered the approaching yacht he laid down his gun, got upon his knees, and shook both his fists at the boy who stood at the helm.

"You're always around when you are not wanted, Gus Egan," said he, fiercely. "If you know when you are well off, you will learn to mind your own business. I've the best notion in the world to send a charge of duck-shot after you."

"He would do it in a minute if he thought he could escape the consequences," said Egan, in a low tone. "He is one of the fellows who has so often threatened me. The detective took his big gun away from him, and now he has to resort to a sink-boat to get birds for market."

"I shouldn't like to make an enemy of that man," observed Bert, as he passed the glass over

to Hopkins. "Unless his countenance belies him, he is capable of doing anything."

"His face is a true index to his character," replied Egan. "He is accused of almost everything that's bad, and some day there will be trouble in this neighborhood. He is under indictment for shooting ducks contrary to law, but he says he will get up the biggest kind of a fight before he will be arrested, and he means every word of it."

"If that yawl of yours scares just one more flock of ducks for me, she will never scare another," continued the man in the sink-boat. "You have done about damage enough on this bay by taking the bread out of poor men's mouths, and it is high time you were larnt better manners."

Egan, who did not act as though he had either seen or heard the occupant of the sink-boat, kept the Sallie away a point or two, so as to clear the outer edge of the decoys, and ran on down the bay until he came opposite to a small board cabin that stood on the shore in the midst of a little grove; then he threw the yacht up into the wind and called out: "O Eph!" whereupon an aged negro, who was sitting on a bench beside the open door, arose and hobbled down to the beach, bow-

ing and pulling at his almost brimless hat as he came.

“That’s old Eph, the terrapin hunter,” observed Egan. “He makes anywhere from ten to forty dollars a week out of his ‘birds,’ as they are called, but, like the most of his race, he spends his money as fast as he gets it, and what will he do when the rheumatism gets a good grip on him and he has to quit work, I don’t know. I suppose he will have to fall back on father for support, because he belonged to our family before the war.”

“Terrapins are nothing more nor less than mud-turtles, I believe?” said Curtis, inquiringly.

Egan replied that that was just what they were — turtles that were caught in tide-water; and then he called out to the negro, who had by this time reached the water’s edge:

“I say, Eph, have you two or three diamond-backs to spare?”

“Ise allers got some for you, Marse Gus,” was Eph’s answer.

“All right. Come aboard and get this basket.”

The negro stepped into a canoe that lay on the beach close at hand, and a few strokes with the

paddle brought him alongside the yacht. The basket containing their lunch was passed down to him with the request that he would have three diamond-backs, cooked in his best style, ready for them at one o'clock sharp. The negro promised compliance and shoved off for the shore, after exchanging a few complimentary remarks with Egan, who, it was plain, was a favorite of his, while the yacht filed away on her course.

"What is a diamond-back?" asked Don, as soon as they were fairly under way.

"It is a terrapin not less than seven inches in length, measuring along the under shell," answered Egan. "They are better than the larger and coarser kinds, just as a two and a half pound yellow pike is better than one that weighs nine or ten pounds. They bring from twenty-five to thirty-six dollars a dozen, while the river turtles are worth only nine dollars; but the latter are extensively used by hotels and restaurants where they are served up as diamond-backs, just as red-heads are served up as canvas-backs. However, as both those species of ducks live on the same kind of food—wild celery—there is not so much difference between them as there is between the tide-water

and river terrapin. Hallo! Hand me that glass a moment, Curtis."

The boys looked around to discover what it was that had called forth this exclamation from the skipper, and all they could see was a neat little schooner standing up the bay. Egan leveled the glass at her for a second or two, and then handed it back to Curtis, saying:

"Just as I expected. Now look out for breakers."

Curtis, in turn, took a look at the schooner and was surprised to see that she was manned by academy boys, to wit, Enoch Williams, Jones, and Lester Brigham. As the little vessels dashed by each other, moving swiftly in opposite directions, no sign of recognition was exchanged between the crews. They seldom spoke now.

Don and his brother had made commendable progress during their last year at school, and had both received well-earned promotions at the close of the examination. Don was now lieutenant-colonel of the academy battalion, and Bert was the ranking captain; while Lester and his two friends had not been able to win so much as a corporal's *chevrons*. Of course this made them

angry, and they were waiting for an opportunity to be revenged upon Don and Bert. How the latter could be blamed because Lester and his cronies had failed in their examination, it would have puzzled a sensible boy to determine. Probably Lester did not understand the matter himself; but there was one thing he did understand, and that was, that things were going altogether too smoothly with Don and Bert. It would have afforded him infinite pleasure if he could have been the means of getting them into some serious trouble. During the last school term he had watched them as closely as a cat ever watched a mouse, in the hope that he would see a chance to report them for some neglect of duty; but he had his trouble for his pains. As soldiers and students there was not the least fault to be found with them, and if it had not been for Enoch, Lester would have given up in despair. How his friend encouraged him we shall see presently.

“Those fellows will be up to some sort of mischief before we see the last of them,” observed Curtis, after he had taken a good look at the schooner.

“That is my opinion,” said Egan, “and I be-

lieve that Enoch has been up to something already. I don't know it to be a fact, but still I am pretty certain that he is hail fellow well met with these big gunners, and if he is, he will bear watching."

"What is that long black streak out there on the water?" asked Bert, suddenly.

Egan looked in the direction indicated, and a moment later the Sallie came up into the wind, then filled away on the other tack and started back up the bay.

"That is a bed of ducks," said the skipper. "I shouldn't wonder if there were thousands in it. They are only a short distance from the foot of Powell's Island, and it will be no trouble at all to toll them in so that we can get a shot at them."

"Well," said Bert, when Egan paused, "we should like to be told what tolling is."

"I would rather show you than try to explain it to you," was the reply. "The only way to find out is to see for yourself."

The Sallie kept on up the bay until she came opposite to the cabin of the old terrapin-hunter, who at once responded to Egan's lusty hail.

"I want to borrow Bogus for a little while,"

shouted the skipper. "And I say, Eph, bring out a lot of chips with you."

The negro disappeared behind his cabin, and in a few minutes came back again, carrying his hat in his hands, and followed by a little yellow dog. The two got into the canoe, and presently both the dog and the hatful of chips were deposited on the yacht's deck.

"There is a big bed of ducks off Powell's Island, and we are going to shoot some of them," said Egan. "So, perhaps, you had better postpone the cooking of those terrapin until about three o'clock. Be sure and have them ready then, for we shall be hungry."

The old negro went ashore, leaving his dog and the pile of chips behind him ; and the yacht came about and started down the bay again. She held straight for the head of the island, and, running into a little bay thickly lined with trees on both sides, was tied up to an abrupt bank where the water was deep enough to float her. Bogus seemed to know just what he was expected to do ; for when the boys, having buckled on their cartridge-belts, shouldered their guns and stepped ashore, he took up his position at Egan's heels,

and stayed there until he was sent out to perform his allotted part in tolling the ducks.

The young wild-fowlers, led by Egan, directed their course toward a sheltered cove on the other side of the island, and were presently crawling on their hands and knees through the calamus and dry marsh grass which formed a good cover almost to the water's edge. The bay seemed to be full of ducks. None of the visitors, except Hopkins, had ever seen so many in one flock before, and they were greatly disappointed to discover that they were far beyond the reach of the heaviest gun in the party. Indeed, it would have required a good rifle to throw a ball into the midst of them, and the course they were following was taking them farther away from the island every moment.

"We shall get no ducks out of that flock," said Don.

"Then it will be your fault," replied Egan, confidently. "If you will do good work after I bring them within range, we will have canvas-backs for dinner to-morrow. Now, Bogus, let's see how smart you are."

Egan had brought the chips with him in a game-bag. As he spoke, he took one of them out

and tossed it into the water, whereupon Bogus jumped to his feet and skipped in after it. He seized the chip, tossed it into the air, caught it when it descended, and played with it with as much apparent delight as a cat plays with a ball of yarn; the visitors watching his antics with the greatest surprise.

“You have read of the curiosity exhibited by the antelope of the Western plains—how hunters have been known to decoy them within gun-shot by simply waving a colored handkerchief above the grass, have you not?” said Egan, by way of explanation. “Well, the canvas-back has just as much curiosity, as you can see for yourselves.”

The boys, whose attention had been fully occupied by the extraordinary performances of the dog, now turned their eyes toward the flock, and were astonished as well as gratified to observe that a few of them had left the main body and were coming slowly toward the shore. Even at that distance one could see that they were attracted by, and interested in, the actions of the dog. Presently, other ducks came out of the bed and joined them; then a second and larger body appeared, and, what was very surprising to the

visitors, they betrayed the greatest excitement. They would sit up in the water, sustaining themselves by the help of their wings, and then settle down and swim swiftly about, performing the most intricate manoeuvres.

“Easy, boys,” whispered Egan, as Curtis raised his head to obtain a better view of the approaching flock. “If you want to get a shot, you must not show so much as an inch of the top of your hat. They’ve got sharp eyes; and that is what makes them so easy to toll. If they were not constantly on the watch, they would not have seen the dog.”

When Bogus grew tired of playing with the first chip Egan threw out to him, the boy tossed him another. The intelligent and well-trained animal did not act as though he saw the ducks at all; but it was evident that he knew they were coming, for the nearer they approached the shore the more energetically he played. He never uttered the faintest whimper, but kept silently to his work; and the ducks, growing bolder as their number increased, approached with more rapidity and confidence, showing by their actions the liveliest curiosity.

“Now watch them closely, and I will show you something else,” whispered Egan. As he spoke, he began throwing the chips first to the right and then to the left of his place of concealment, and as the dog ran from one to the other, the ducks turned also, closely following all his movements as if they feared that they might lose the most interesting part of the performance. When those in front thought they had come near enough, and showed a disposition to stop, their companions behind pushed them on, while the ducks in the rear came crowding through to inquire into the matter.

By this time the dog had an interested audience of at least five or six hundred ducks in front of him, and not more than seventy-five yards from the shore. They were coming nearer all the while, and, finally, Egan reached for his double-barrel; but, just at that moment, the whole immense flock arose as one duck, with a great roaring of wings and splashing of water, and flew swiftly down the bay.

“Which one of you fellows showed his head?” demanded Egan, laughing heartily at the expression of disappointment and chagrin he saw on the

faces of every one of his companions. "The next time we try to toll a flock of canvas-backs, remember what I told you about their sharp eyes, and be careful to keep out of sight. Look at Bogus! He thinks he was to blame for it, and he expects a whipping."

The boys glanced toward the beach, and there was the dog which had done his part of the work so faithfully, going through all sorts of antics, and saying, as plainly as a dumb brute could say it, that he was very sorry the flock had gone off without giving the young hunters a chance for a shot, and that, if it were his fault, he would be careful to do better next time. First, he would sit up and beg, and then he would lie down and hold up both his paws imploringly, as if he were trying to ward off the blows of a switch; but a friendly word from Egan dispelled all his fears, and made a happy, light-hearted dog of him again.

"You didn't do it, old fellow," said the boy, as Bogus came bounding to his side; "and I can't think what did do it, unless one of these careless friends of mine—— Hold on! I take it all back. There's the cause of the trouble," added Egan,

nodding his head toward the upper end of the bay.

The others looked in the direction indicated, and saw Enoch Williams' schooner coming down under full sail. Whether or not her crew knew that Egan and his companions were trying to toll the ducks within gun-shot, was a question ; but they knew it a moment after they hove in sight, for the young hunters arose from their places of concealment, and stood out in full view of the schooner, which ran down as far as the foot of the island, and then came about, and started back up the bay.

"That move seems to indicate that they knew we were here, and that they came down on purpose to frighten the ducks away," said Hopkins, with no little indignation in his tones.

"What else could you expect of such fellows as they are?" demanded Egan. "Never mind. There is more than one flock of canvas-backs on the bay, and they can't drive them all away from us, no matter how hard they try. Now, we will take a short sail, and then we will run back to Eph's, and get our terrapin."

As it happened, Hopkins and Egan were both

mistaken in their opinions regarding the object the schooner's company had in view when they followed the Sallie down to Powell's Island. Enoch and Jones had an idea in their heads, but they did not know that Egan and his friends were after the ducks until they saw them rise from their hiding-places. They were acting as volunteer spies upon the movements of Egan and his guests, and if we step aboard the schooner, and listen to some of the conversation that took place between Enoch and his two companions, we may be able to understand why they did it.

It will be remembered that Egan and his guests had got into the way of spending a portion of their vacations at one another's homes, the first being spent in Mississippi. When Lester Brigham saw how they enjoyed themselves at DON GORDON'S SHOOTING-BOX, he proposed to his friends, Enoch and Jones, that they should pass *their* vacations in the same way; and so it came about that while Egan, Hopkins, and Don and Bert Gordon were hunting and fishing with Curtis in the wilds of Maine, Lester's Maryland friends were visiting with him at his home near Rochdale. It was not accident that had brought them

all together in Maryland during this particular vacation. Lester had come there with a fully developed plan in his head, and Enoch and Jones were ready and eager to help him carry it out. Lester and Jones had been at Enoch's home two weeks, impatiently awaiting the arrival of Egan's guests, who, as we have said, were sojourning with Hopkins, enjoying themselves in shooting quails and snipes. On the morning of which we write they went out for a sail on the bay before breakfast, and it was while they were on their way home that their eyes were gladdened by the sight of the Sallie under sail.

"There they are at last!" exclaimed Enoch, who was the first to discover Egan's boat as she moved gracefully away from her anchorage. He was standing at the helm of his schooner, the Firefly, and Lester and Jones were sitting near him in the cock-pit.

"They? Who?" inquired the former, who, for a wonder, happened to be thinking about something besides his contemplated revenge on the boys who had unintentionally excited his jealousy.

"Why, your particular friends, the Gordon boys."

formed a feat during his sojourn in Maine of which any veteran hunter would have been proud to boast. He had killed a full-grown moose, whose antlers had been given an honored place in his mother's dining-room.

"I don't believe Don shot that moose himself," said Lester Brigham, when he heard of it. "Some old hunter shot it for him, and he comes home and palms it off as a trophy of his own skill with the rifle. He tried hard to get up a reputation on the strength of that fight with the rioters, which really did not amount to any thing; but after Williams and I risked our lives to save the crew of the Mystery, Don and his crowd had not another word to say. There was danger in that undertaking, I beg you to remember, and if Don and his brother had been the heroes of it, they never would leave off talking about it."

Lester was standing in the Rochdale post-office waiting for his mail when he said this, and Enoch Williams and Jones were with him. Around them was a crowd of boys, who had so often heard them tell of the wonderful exploits they had performed during their runaway expedition, that they were tired of listening to them. Knowing

these three fellows as well as we do, it is hardly necessary to say that, while magnifying their own achievements, they did not scruple to speak in the most contemptuous terms of what Don Gordon had done, and to declare, in so many words, that his promotion and Bert's was owing entirely to favoritism. They wore their uniforms on all occasions, carried themselves very stiffly when they walked, and tried in every way to impress the Rochdale boys with a sense of their importance. They succeeded with some, while others, who were civil enough to their faces, laughed at them behind their backs. The Mississippi boys were not lacking in common sense if they did live in the country. Williams and Jones were getting ready to go home now, their preparations being somewhat hastened by the arrival of Don and his brother, whom, for reasons of their own, they did not care to meet.

"We heard down here that that fight with the rioters was a pretty severe one," observed Fred Packard.

"We don't doubt it," answered Jones. "It is very natural for some people to praise themselves when there is no one to do it for them. I would

be perfectly willing to go through one just like it, and take my chances."

"So would I," exclaimed Enoch.

"Here too," chimed in Lester, puffing out his cheeks and looking very brave and warlike indeed. "And I wouldn't brag about it after I got home, either."

"Well, then, why did you not go to Hamilton with Don and the rest?" inquired Fred.

"Because I couldn't. The third company went, and I belonged to the fourth. I volunteered to go, and so did my two friends here, but the superintendent has his favorites among the students, and of course they had to go, no matter if they were the biggest cowards in the academy."

"I conclude that you were just spoiling for a fight," said Joe Packard, with a smile that was highly exasperating to Lester and his two friends. "If that was the case, what made you pull your head under the bed-clothes and pretend that you were ill when the bugle sounded that false alarm?"

"I didn't do any thing of the kind; did I, boys?" cried Lester, appealing to his guests who were prompt to sustain him in his denial of the

humiliating charge. "If Don Gordon told you any story of that sort, he is a mean, sneaking——"

"Hold on!" interrupted Fred. "Don is a friend of mine, and somehow I can't bear to hear him abused. Besides——"

Here Fred stopped and jerked his thumb over his shoulder toward the open door. The boys looked, and saw Don and Bert in the act of hitching their ponies to a tree on the opposite side of the road. They were dressed in citizens' clothes, and although they did not walk with the regulation step, nor turn square corners, any one could see at a glance that they had been under military training, and that they had paid some attention to it.

Lester took just one look at them, and then leaned his elbow on the show-case and rested his head on his hand. He had evidently forgotten what he was going to say about Don.

"Another thing, Gordon has never said a word to my brother or me about you since he came home," continued Fred. "He isn't that sort. He is much too manly to try to build himself up by pulling others down, and that is more than I can

he was Lester Brigham the hero, they were anxious to cultivate his acquaintance. That was something to which he could not consent; and so he, and Enoch and Jones following his example, snubbed Fred and Joe most royally as often as the opportunity was presented. If the high-spirited Packard boys grew tired of such treatment after a while, and showed Lester and his boastful guests up in their true colors, can anybody blame them?

"Here comes Don," said Jones, in a suppressed voice. "Don't salute him."

"Of course not!" exclaimed Lester, who seemed to grow angry at the mere mention of such a thing. "We are not at the academy now, and we are just as good as he is."

"Hallo, major!" cried all the Rochdale boys, as Don and his brother came into the store. "Glad to see you back safe and sound, and none the worse for your fight with the rioters. You don't act a bit stuck up if you are a big officer."

"Just listen to 'em!" whispered Lester, who could not conceal his indignation. "The world is full of toadies."

"And always will be," answered Jones, who was

equally angry and disgusted. "Whenever some fortunate accident raises a chap a round or two, you will always find plenty who are willing to to bow to him."

"Well, major," said Fred Packard, "I hear that—"

"O, for goodness sake, drop that," interrupted Don. "Drop it, I say, or I'll not talk to you. I am at home now, and I want to forget school and every thing connected with it until the time comes to go back."

Don's friends knew very well that he cared nothing for his military title, except in so far as it marked his standing at the academy, and that was the reason they addressed him by it—simply to bother him. They gathered in a group about him and Bert, and Lester and his two friends being left to themselves, secured their mail as soon as the window was opened, and left the post-office, looking straight before them as they passed out at the door, and giving the brothers no chance to salute them, even if it had been their place to do so.

"Now, Don," said one of the boys, who had not an opportunity to speak to him before, "is it true

that Lester and Williams took the crew off Mr. Packard's yacht at the risk of their own lives?"

"It is," answered Don, readily. "Bert and I were there and saw it all. It was a brave act, and everybody who knows the circumstances says so."

"But still Lester pulled the quilts over his head and feigned illness when the bugle sounded; and Jones, who belonged to your company, was left behind because he hid in one of the coal-bins," said Joe Packard.

As Don could not deny this, he said nothing about it. He took his mail as soon as he could get it, and then he and Bert mounted their ponies and rode homeward, accompanied by the Packard boys.

The two brothers spent this vacation in much the same way they spent the first one after their northern friends, Hopkins, Curtis, and Egan had gone home. Bert studied hard in the hope of being able to exchange his single bar for a captain's shoulder-strap at the next examination, but Don never looked into the book. He had earned a long rest, and had come home to enjoy it in his own way. He rode and hunted to his heart's content, swung Indian clubs, punched the sand-bag

with heavy dumb-bells, and ran a mile every pleasant day at the top of his speed with a view of lowering the academy record during the next encampment. When the time came to go back he was ready, and his mother saw him depart without any misgivings. Don had showed her that he could behave himself, if he set about it in dead earnest, and now that he had tried it for a whole year, and made many friends and won his promotion by it, she was firm in her belief that he was well-started on the right road at last. Don thought so too, but he did not for a moment relax his vigilance. He could not afford to if he were going to make Egan's prediction come out true, and wear the lieutenant-colonel's shoulder-straps during his last year at the academy. If he desired to use the authority and enjoy the privileges those shoulder-straps would give him, it was necessary that he should win them at the very next examination.

A few days before they left Rochdale, Don and Bert rode over to Lester Brigham's to see if he would be ready to start when they did—not because they wanted him for traveling companion, but because they thought it would be a friendly

thing for them to do ; but Lester received them in so freezing a manner, and showed so plainly that he did not care for their company, that they left him to himself and set out for Bridgeport alone.

“I don't want anything to do with them or the crowd they run with,” soliloquized Lester, as he saw them ride away. “I shall have friends enough at the academy without them. Enoch said he knew of two or three good fellows, who had about half made up their minds to sign the muster-roll this year, and if he brings them with him, they may be able to think up some way in which we can enjoy ourselves. We have already tried the only plan I could think of, and I shouldn't have thought of that if it had not been for Huggins.”

Lester reached Bridgeport without any mishap, and when he stepped out of the carriage that took him and his trunk from the railroad depot to the academy, he found Williams and Jones waiting for him. The “good fellows” were there also—three of them, and of course they were boys after Enoch's own heart. They lived on Long Island, and Enoch went to school with them before his father moved down into Maryland. They had not come to the academy to learn, but because they

wanted to take part in the sports and pastimes which fell to the lot of the students, and which Enoch had described in glowing colors ; although he had never said a word concerning the long, tiresome hours of study and drill that came six days in the week as regularly as the deep tones of the big bell rang out from the cupola. They wanted the honor of belonging to the school, a portion of whose members had stood up so manfully in defense of law and order ; but they never stopped to ask themselves how they would act, should they be called upon to perform a similar service.

“ Here we are ! ” exclaimed Enoch, as he grasped Lester’s hand in both his own and shook it cordially, “ and I have good cause for complaint already. That little snipe, Bert Gordon, has been detailed to assign the boys to their rooms (more favoritism right at the start, you see), and when I asked him if he would be kind enough to chum you on me, he replied he did not think it would be just the thing to do.”

“ Why wouldn’t it ? ” demanded Lester, after he had shaken hands with Enoch’s three friends, who were introduced to him as Dale, Barry, and Morris.

“Because it suits His Royal Highness to keep you two apart,” said Jones. “He thinks you wouldn’t study anything but plans for mischief.”

“Is that any of his business?” cried Lester, who was very indignant. “He and Don throw on altogether too many airs. I wish we could think up some way to get those straps off his shoulders.”

“That is simply impossible,” said Enoch. “He will be the ranking captain next year, and Don will be lieutenant-colonel. You wait and see. They have succeeded in getting on the blind side of the teachers, and their promotion is a dead sure thing.”

“Couldn’t he be drawn into a scrape that would do the business for him?” asked Dale.

Lester and Jones both answered that he could not. Bert was one of the good little boys, and had never learned how to disobey any of the rules. There had been a time, they said, when his brother Don could be induced to join in anything that had fun and danger in it; but he was major of the battalion now, and besides, Egan and the fellows who belonged to that crowd, had so much influence over him that it would be useless to approach him on the subject of “scrapes.”

“And dangerous as well,” chimed in Enoch. “He has an uncomfortable habit of telling the truth at all times and on all occasions, and if he is caught, he will own right up.”

“He did that very thing the year before I came here, and brought some jolly boys into serious trouble by it,” observed Lester.

“Humph!” exclaimed Dale, contemptuously. “I wouldn’t have any intercourse with such a milk-sop.”

“He’s no milk-sop, and there is no boy in school who dares call him that to his face, either,” said Jones, who, in his heart, admired Don Gordon, and earnestly wished that he was like him in some respects. “It is true that he has too much honor to lie himself out of a scrape, but he won’t go back on a friend.”

“I don’t see how you make that out,” snapped Lester, who never could bear to hear a civil word said about either of the Gordon boys.

“Why, when he was hauled up for allowing Clarence Duncan and Tom Fisher, and all the rest of the guard-runners to go by him one night when he was on duty, didn’t he come very near being sent down for refusing to give their names

when he was ordered to do so?" demanded Jones.

"Some of you fellows make a great fuss about that," said Lester, with a gesture of impatience. "One would think, by the way you harp on it, that Gordon is the only boy in the world who has the courage to stand by a school-mate. If he was so very anxious to keep the guard-runners out of trouble, why did he not say that no one went by him while he had charge of the floor? That's what any decent boy would have done."

"And that same decent boy would have found himself-brought up with a round turn directly," replied Jones, "for the superintendent knew right where to look to find every fellow who broke the rules that night. Don did the best that could have been done under the circumstances, for Duncan was bound to go down any way."

While Lester and his friends were talking in this way, they were standing at the foot of the wide stone steps that led up to the front door of the academy; and it was not until their teeth began to chatter that they thought of going into the building to get out of reach of the keen, cutting wind which came over the frozen surface of

the river. Gathering about the huge stove in the hall, they threw off their gloves and mufflers and looked about them. There was a large pile of trunks in one end of the hall, and Bert Gordon, assisted by one of the corporals, was trying his best to get rid of it ; but fast as his four stalwart porters worked, the pile grew in size, for a train had just passed through the village, and carriage-loads of students and wagon-loads of luggage were arriving every minute. Some of the new comers shook hands with Lester and his two cronies and were introduced to the boys from Long Island ; but the majority of them, although they crowded up to the stove to get warm, did not notice Lester and his companions at all.

“Do they feel too big to speak to a fellow ?” whispered Dale, who had never been told of the wide gulf that separated the members of the different classes.

“That’s just what’s the matter with them,” answered Jones. “A good many of them are officers, and the others belong to the first class. You must be careful to say ‘sir’ when you have occasion to speak to them.”

"Say 'sir' to those little brats of boys!" exclaimed Dale, who was greatly amazed.

"That's the law."

"I don't care if it is; I won't do it. I am just as good as they ever dare be."

"No body disputes that," said Enoch. "Jones is only trying to post you so that you can keep out of trouble. You must not only address them as he says, but you must not address them at all unless they first speak to you. Of course if you want any information, you are at perfect liberty to go to your company officers to get it; the rule does not apply in that case."

"Well, I'll be shot if that don't beat any thing I ever heard of," said Morris. "Suppose we should quietly ignore all such senseless rules—what then?"

"If you have any idea of doing that, you had better make an excuse to get away from here before you put on the uniform," replied Enoch, with a laugh that spoke volumes. "They will haze you till you can't sleep o' nights."

"How will they do it?"

"O, there are plenty of ways. They are never at a loss for something, and they have the faculty

of doing the very thing you would rather they would not do. If they find that any particular way of hazing bothers you more than another, they will use it every chance they get."

"The meanest of all the mean ways of hazing is the second exercise in 'setting up,'" observed Jones. "My back aches yet whenever I think of it. You see," he added, addressing himself to Dale, "when I first came here I kicked against the rules, just as you show a disposition to do. I couldn't see why a boy who wore two blue stripes around his arm should be so high up in the world that I couldn't speak to him if I wanted to, and one day I addressed a friendly remark to one of the corporals. Great Caesar! I thought he would take my head off, he snapped me up so spitefully. After he quit jawing me I thought he had got through, but he hadn't—not by a long shot. A few days after that, he drilled a squad of us in 'setting up,' and I went through the exercise a hundred and eighty times before that little fice of a corporal gave the command 'three.'"

"It means 'stop,'" replied Lester, who had also had some very disagreeable experience with a corporal to whom, he was determined, he would

not show a proper amount of respect. "It is the same as 'rest,' after a squad or company stacks arms."

"What sort of a drill is it, any way?" asked Barry. "Is it so very hard on a fellow?"

"You do it a hundred and eighty times without stopping, and then you can answer the question for yourself," was Enoch's response. "I can give it to you in the language of the tactics. The commands are: '*Second*, EXERCISE. Raise the arms from the sides, extended to their full length, till the hands meet above the head, palms of the hands to the front, fingers pointing upward, thumbs locked, right thumb in front, the shoulders pressed back. (Two.) Bend over till the hands, if possible, touch the ground, keeping the the arms and knees straight. (THREE.) Resume the position of a soldier.' Try it a few times after you have taken your overcoat off, and see how funny it is."

Jones and Lester Brigham both gave it as their private opinion that Barry would learn to his entire satisfaction that there was nothing "funny" in it.

CHAPTER V.

LESTER IS WAKED UP.

“**B**UT ‘setting up’ is a very mild form of hazing compared with what I had to go through when I first came here,” said Jones, after a little pause. “Three years ago the members of the yearling class who were not lucky enough to obtain *chevrons*, used to treat a fellow rather roughly. They formed themselves into a committee of the whole, whose business it was to see that a plebe’s life was made miserable. Why, it wasn’t safe for a fourth class boy to go into the wash-room alone. I did it once, and the first thing the yearlings did was to give me a glimpse of Niagara Falls.”

“How did they do that?” inquired Morris.

“They stood me on my head, and let two streams of cold water from the hydrants run up the legs of my trowsers. Then they showed me

how to climb Zion's hill, which is simply trying to walk up the wall to any tune the plebe happens to know. He must sing his own accompaniment. Then they ordered me to recite the alphabet forward and backward with appropriate gestures ; in short, they did any and every thing they could think of that would make one appear ridiculous."

"I would have seen them happy before I would make such a fool of myself," said Dale, angrily.

"You would, eh ? Then you would have got the neatest kind of a thrashing."

"Very well. I would have reported the last one of them as soon as I could have found my way to the superintendent's office."

"And been sent to Coventry for it ?" exclaimed Jones.

"Coventry ! I don't know what you mean."

"Why, he means that if you were to run to the teachers with a little thing like that, or with any thing, in fact, that savored of tale-bearing, all the boys would go back on you as soon as they heard of it. They wouldn't speak to you, or even look at you," said Enoch. "You would be as much alone in this big school as ever Robinson Crusoe was on his island."

“Then what is a plebe to do when the yearlings, as you call them, take a notion to show him Niagara Falls, or teach him to climb Zion’s hill?” demanded Dale.

“O, such hazing as that is a thing of the past,” replied Jones; and this assurance was very comforting to the three boys from Long Island. “The last time it was tried was when Duncan, Fisher and their crowd, took Sam Arkwright out of his bed in the attic, with the intention of ducking him in the Big Pond. They got him out on the ice, but before they could stick him in, Don Gordon came up and spoiled their little game. At first they thought they would put him and his brother in too; but Don handled Duncan, who was the bully of the school, with so much ease, that the others were afraid to touch him. More than that, they dared not attempt to haze any other plebe, for Don hinted very plainly that those who tried it would have to answer to him for it.”

“It is a fact,” said Lester, seeing that Dale looked a little incredulous. “One single plebe backed a class of seventy-five yearlings square down.”

“You needn’t speak of it in a tone so con-

temptuous," said Jones, warmly. "You are a yearling now, and you and your class are at liberty to start the hazing business going again, if you feel so inclined. I dare you to do it."

Jones knew that he was perfectly safe in saying this, and so did Enoch. We know that Lester was just the one to urge others on to performances of this kind, and he would have looked upon the attempt of some unlucky plebe to climb Zion's hill to a tune of his own singing as an interesting spectacle; but the promise of the lieutenant-colonel's silver leaf at the close of the next examination, would not have induced him to take an active part in the proceedings. Don's big heart would not let him stand quietly by and see a helpless student imposed upon, and Lester knew it. By his victory over Clarence Duncan Don had broken up the barbarous practice of hazing most effectually.

Just then a door at the farther end of the hall was opened, and five boys came out. Three of them were dressed in citizen's clothes, and the other two were in uniform. One of the latter was a short, thick-set fellow, who wore his hands in his pockets, and bent so far forward when he laughed

that he showed the silver ornaments in his shoulder straps. The other was considerably taller, and straight as an arrow and looked every inch the soldier. That the two in uniform were officers of rank was made evident by the actions of a party of students who were sitting on a bench near the door, waiting for an opportunity to report their arrival to the adjutant. They arose to their feet as one boy, and raised their hands to their caps; while the officers and their civilian companions, after returning the salute, stepped forward and shook hands with them in the most friendly manner.

"I'll bet they won't be so condescending when they go by this crowd," said Lester, in a tone of disgust.

"Who are they, any way?" asked Morris.

"The two in uniform wear the brass collars among the students," replied Jones. "The short one is Colonel Mack, and the other is Major Gordon, the lieutenant's brother."

"Isn't that enough to convince you that promotions in this school go by favor of the teachers?" demanded Lester. "Two commissions in one family!"

"The other three are Egan, Hopkins and Curtis—graduates who are taking the finishing course," continued Jones, paying no attention to Lester's ill-humored remarks. "They are all chums, and when you see one of them loafing around, you may be sure that the others are not far away. They even spend their vacations together, putting in the time in hunting and fishing—all except the colonel, who thinks more of his books than he does of a gun or fly-rod. They went up into Maine last fall, and while they were camping out in the woods, the major killed a full-grown moose."

"Aw! What is the use of keeping that preposterous yarn in circulation?" exclaimed Lester. "Every time I hear it I am reminded of the 'Three Fishers,' who went out to catch trout, but who never got a bite, although they angled faithfully all day long; nevertheless when—

' Three fishers went into town that night
Their "speckled beauties" were fair to see;
They talked of their sports with keen delight—
The envy of all the fraternity.
For men will fish, and men will lie,
And what they can't catch they're sure to buy,
And never repent in the morning.'

That's the way it was with Don and his moose ; he shot it with a silver bullet.

"I have heard you say that before, but I can't believe that it is true," retorted Jones. "Don Gordon never had to draw a long bow to win a reputation either as a student, soldier or hunter ; and, besides, the boys who were with him wouldn't back up a false statement of any kind."

"Private Lester Brigham, room 39, third floor!" shouted the corporal who was acting as Bert's assistant ; and this broke up the party about the stove, and put an end to the discussion. Lester followed the porter, who shouldered his trunk and went up stairs with it. He had a great curiosity to see who it was that he was to be "chummed" on during the year, and when he reached the room to which he had been assigned, he found out, for the boy was there waiting for him.

"It's just what I might have expected from that little snipe of a Bert Gordon," soliloquized Lester, when his eyes fell upon his new room-mate, who was sitting at the table with a book before him. Instead of chumming me on a decent fellow, like Enoch Williams, he has gone and shoved me in with one of the good little boys. I shall see no

fun in my room this term." Then, aloud, he said, as he extended a very limp hand to be shaken by the boy at the table: "Ah! Ross, you and I are to live together for awhile, are we? I don't know how we shall get on, for your way of enjoying yourself and mine are widely different."

"Perhaps there will not be as much difference this term as there was last," answered Ross, sinking back in his chair, while Lester opened his trunk and took out his uniform. "I came here, last term, fully resolved to behave myself. I studied hard; I never ran the guard to eat pancakes at Cony Ryan's; I never wilfully disobeyed any of the rules of the school; and what did I make by it? Not even a corporal's stripes. You and your crowd set the law at defiance, ran away in Mr. Packard's schooner, and had a good time generally, and yet you are no worse off to-day than I am. What makes you look at me in that way?" added Ross, for Lester, who was kneeling in front of his trunk, never took his eyes off his room-mate's face while the latter was speaking.

"It is because I am surprised to hear you talk so," was the reply. "I thought you were one of the good boys, and when I came into this room

and found whom I was chummed on, I was disgusted. Williams wanted me put in his room, but Bert Gordon wouldn't listen to it. I suppose he was afraid we would get up another runaway scheme."

"You fellows must have had lots of fun while you were gone," continued Ross.

"We certainly did," replied Lester, with great enthusiasm. "Of course, we knew that we would be captured in time, for, with the exception of Williams and myself, there was not a boy on board the Sylph who knew how to stand his trick at the wheel. I suppose you know that I was the original commander of the yacht?"

"Yes; I heard all about it. Why did you give it up?"

"Because I wasn't sure that I could handle so large a vessel as the Sylph in a narrow river, having always been accustomed to plenty of sea room. Besides, Enoch wanted the command, and I didn't. I proposed the thing, and so long as the boys got some fun out of it, that was all I cared for."

"Have you thought of anything for this term?" inquired Ross.

"I have not; and if any of the other fellows have, I don't know it."

"I wish you would be good enough to keep me posted. I didn't see any fun at all last term, and I am ready for anything now."

"I can't promise to do that until I have consulted the other fellows," was Lester's reply. "But I will speak to them and see what they think about it."

"I've got plenty of money, and I am ready to spend it, too."

"But the rules say that you must give it to the superintendent for safe keeping."

"I can take care of it myself. I gave him a little, just for a blind, and the rest I shall keep by me. That's what you did last term."

"Yes; and if it had not been for Mack, and a few other boys I don't at all like, I should have lost the last red cent of it. I wish that somebody else had recovered it for me, for I don't like to feel that I am under obligations to Mack and his crowd."

It was plain that Ross, having become thoroughly disheartened by his failure to win promotion at the last examination, had abandoned all hope of ever being anything better than a private, and had fully made up his mind to cast

his lot with Lester Brigham and the rest of the law-breakers.

“He don’t care a snap of his finger for the fun he thinks he is going to see,” soliloquized Lester, who, having put on his uniform, left the room to report his arrival to the adjutant, “but he wants revenge on the teachers and on the students who received warrants and commissions. How he imagines that he is going to hurt either of them by breaking the rules, I can’t understand; he will find that he will hurt himself instead. Well, I don’t know that it is any of my business. I shall say a good word for him to Enoch and the rest, because he’s got money. They made pretty free with my pocket-book last term, and now they can look to somebody else for their pies and pancakes.”

By the time it began to grow dark, all the students who were to attend the academy during the year had reported for duty. There was guard-mount that night, it being the 14th of January, and the next morning the roar of the field-piece announced that the business for the next twelve months had begun in earnest. And a dreary year indeed it proved to be to some of the students. Jones and the other discontented fellows in the

second class, often declared, with no little disgust and indignation, that they had never seen anything like it. Cony Ryan was often heard to make the same remark. His little parlor, which had so frequently echoed to the songs and speeches of the guard-runners, was now entirely deserted of evenings, although Lester and Enoch and some of their particular friends occasionally dropped in on Saturday afternoon to eat pancakes and maple syrup, and to mourn with him over the days that were past.

"We can't help it, Cony," Enoch once said to him. "It is all Don Gordon's fault and Bert's. Don is reported to have said, when he shook hands with Mack at the beginning of the term, that he should consider himself unworthy of the position he holds if there were a single instance of successful guard-running this year. That is always the way with these bad fellows, you know. Whenever they turn over a new leaf, and do it in dead earnest, they go just as far the other way. They become enthusiasts and radicals."

"Radicals!" repeated Jones. "In modern politics a radical is a person who advocates extreme measures of reform. Radical is good. Gordon, the Radical."

"I understand all about that," said Cony. "But are you boys willing that he should boss the academy? If you were major of the battalion do you imagine that you could keep him inside the grounds if he didn't want to stay? Not by a long shot. He would find some way to outwit you, and the harder you made it for him, the better he would like it. That's the kind of a cadet his father was, and Don is just like him. I know it, for I have learned to read boys as easily as I can read so many books."

"But you don't understand it, smart as you think you are," exclaimed Lester, who was enraged at the imputation that was thus cast upon the skill and cunning of himself and his companions. "You see before you at this moment a crowd of fellows who are as sharp as Don Gordon ever dare be, and who have quite as good a supply of courage."

"I can't see it," answered Cony, with something like a ring of contempt in his tones. "I was sorry to hear that Gordon had quit guard-running—"

"I can easily believe that," interrupted Jones, with a smile and a sidelong glance at his com-

panions. "Don was always well supplied with the needful, and he was not at all backward about spending it. When he asked for money, the superintendent never refused to let him have it."

"I wasn't thinking about his money," said Cony, hastily. "I admired his pluck, his ingenuity in baffling the guards, and more than all, I liked to talk to him, for he is smarter than a steel trap. I say I was sorry to hear that Don had gone over to Egan and that crowd," he added, addressing himself to Lester, "for I knew that we should see no more of him here, unless he happened to look in of a Saturday; but when I heard that it was you who proposed that runaway expedition in Mr. Packard's yacht, I told myself that the boys had another leader who was fully as daring as any they had ever had."

"And it is my opinion that they were, and still are, satisfied with the change," answered Lester, with great complacency. "Ask them if we didn't see lots of fun while we were cruising in the Sylph, and see what their reply will be."

"Yes; but you stopped at that," exclaimed Cony. "One single, solitary plan was all your brain would hold."

Cony might have added that that single plan never originated in Lester's brain. The latter never would have thought of it if it had not been for Huggins. Cony knew just how much the academy boys thought of Lester as a leader, for he had heard through Jones that Enoch Williams had pronounced him a fraud of the first water ; but he wanted to wake him up and set him to work at something, if he could, for his revenue had fallen off considerably since Don Gordon declared that an absolute stop must be put to guard-running.

"You don't seem to have any originality about you," continued Cony, still addressing his remarks to Lester. "You are a boy of one idea ; and now that you have got that out of your head, you don't seem to be able to scare up any more. If you are fit to lead your comrades, you will prove it before many more days have passed over your head."

"But how can I prove it ?" demanded Lester, who was pleased to know that Cony looked upon him as a leader among his fellows. "There never were such precautions taken against guard-running before ; all the old students say so. The officer of the guard hardly ever sits down for more than five

minutes at a time ; Don and Mack make it a point to go the rounds when you are least expecting to see them ; and never a night passes that they don't look into every dormitory in the building."

"In other words, being full of tricks himself, Don knows just how to go to work to head off every other trick that can be conjured up," Jones remarked. "I tell you, Cony, they have drawn the reins tight so far this term, and all the signs seem to indicate that they will not be slackened an inch."

"No matter for that," was Cony's response. "I know an army of boys who were graduated at this school, and who, if they were here now, would laugh at Don Gordon and his new regulations. If Gordon was the same fellow he was when he first came here, he too would laugh at all such rules, and run the guard as often as he felt like it. What you boys want is a leader in fact as well as in name—somebody who has brains enough to think up plans for your amusement, and courage and skill enough to carry them out. I thought—I really thought that Brigham was that sort, but I have been disappointed in him."

"He isn't any more disappointed in him than

we are," whispered Enoch, as he and the rest bent their steps toward the academy, the time for which their passes were granted having nearly expired. "We found out long ago that he is all talk and no do."

"And Cony knows it," replied Jones. "He was only trying to put a little life into Lester, because he wants to see the color of some more of his money. That was what he was up to, and you may depend upon it."

"That is a very nice place to get away to," observed Morris, who had never visited Cony Ryan's hotel before; "but what a cross old chap the landlord is!"

"That's only his way of talking," Enoch hastened to explain. "He isn't cross at all. He likes to see fun—nothing suits him better than to have that little parlor crowded so full of boys that another one could not be pushed in edgewise—and he hoped that by giving Brigham a good overhauling he could hurt his pride, put some ambition into him and set guard-running to going again; but I am afraid he is destined to be disappointed in that. Lester's will is good enough, but he lacks the ability."

"He doesn't like the way Cony rallied him on his inactivity, and I shouldn't wonder if he had put his thinking-cap on," observed Jones.

"That's just it," said Lester, frankly. "Now, that I think of the matter, we have showed ourselves to be a pretty set of fellows to let one or two boys get the weather-gauge of us so completely, without a single word or act of remonstrance on our part. I don't intend that this state of affairs shall continue much longer."

"Good for you, Brigham!" cried all the boys, in concert.

"I knew you could think of something, if you went about it in earnest," added Enoch. "What do you propose?"

"Nothing yet. I haven't got my wits fairly at work; but I will have an idea to present for your consideration when I meet you to-morrow morning." And then he wondered what in the world he should do if he failed to keep his promise.

"Good for you!" shouted the boys, again. "Will it be another picnic on the bay?"

"Of course not," Enoch hastened to reply. "We've had enough of picnics; we want something new this time, and the more excitement and

danger there are in it, the better I, for one, shall like it. We want to perform an exploit that has never been attempted or even thought of since the Bridgeport academy had an existence. None of us ever dreamed of so daring a feat as running off with a private yacht, until Brigham suggested it to us, and I know that when he gets ready to report the result of his cogitations, he will astonish us. All we've got to do is to give him time."

Enoch's words were meant to be encouraging, but they were not. On the contrary, the effect they produced upon Lester was a disheartening one. In order to meet the approval of all his friends, the plan he proposed must be entirely original, and there must be danger and excitement in it. Lester began to be afraid that he had promised more than he could fulfill. He relapsed into silence again, and as soon as he had reported his return to the officer of the day, he made the best of his way to his dormitory. His room-mate was there, and the manner in which he was greeted by him astonished Lester not a little.

Ross had been "gated" for thirty days on account of some unsoldier-like conduct in the ranks during dress-parade, and this prevented

him from accompanying Lester and his party to Cony Ryan's. He had felt very ill-humored over it at first, but he was glad of it now. So was Lester, when he heard and comprehended the first words his companion addressed to him.

"Brigham," said Ross, in a suppressed tone of voice, at the same time jumping up to close and lock the door, "I have got hold of something that has suggested an idea to me, and if you are as smart as I think you are, you can perform an exploit that will throw your picnic on the Sylph far into the shade. I never heard of such a thing being done, but I don't see why it *can't* be done."

Was it any wonder that Lester was surprised as well as delighted? He felt like taking Ross in his arms and hugging him; but he didn't. He dropped into the nearest chair and looked at him without speaking.

CHAPTER VI.

A DINNER IN PROSPECT.

“I SAY, Gordon!” exclaimed Colonel Mack, as he stretched himself at full length upon the sofa in the neatly furnished dormitory which the ranking officers of the battalion, whoever they might be, always occupied in common. “This thing is getting to be monotonous. Put away that cyclopedia and talk to me.”

Don closed the ponderous book of reference, which he had been intently studying for the last hour, and putting his hands into his pockets settled back in his chair and looked across the table toward his chum.

“Do you know that Enoch Williams and his crowd declare that it is a downright shame the way things are going on?” continued Mack. “They say that your promotion, and the manifesto you issued at the beginning of the term, have

taken the pluck and ambition out of every decent boy in the academy."

"What manifesto?" demanded Don.

"About guard-running."

"I didn't issue any."

"Didn't you say that you were going to do your best to put a stop to it, and that every boy who succeeded in getting out of the grounds after taps could call on you for the price of a plate of pancakes at Cony Ryan's?"

"I did, and you said the same thing."

"I know it; and I know, too, that we have brought blessings on our heads from two different factions—from the faculty, who say that the battalion was never in better trim than it is at present; and from Lester Brigham and his adherents, who declare that we are the meanest pair that ever lived, and that we exceed our authority every day in the week. They would like to disgrace us before the whole school, if they could."

Don laughed, but said nothing. He knew just how Enoch and the fellows who had accompanied him on his runaway expedition felt toward himself and Mack, but it did not make him at all uncomfortable. He ate and slept, and enjoyed himself

in various ways as well as he ever did. Being one of the highest officers of the academy it was his duty to prevent, as far as lay in his power, all violations of the rules. This duty he performed quietly and effectually, and without fear or favor. He seemed to know everything that went on in and about the academy. He did not intend that what he said concerning guard-running should become noised abroad ; but somehow it did, and a great many threats had been made. In addition to this, Cony Ryan had offered extra inducements to the successful guard-runner, but no one had yet come forward to claim the pancakes. Don knew that if a single student escaped from the grounds through his negligence, he (Don) would be a candidate for a court-martial, which would put an end to all his hopes of picking up the lieutenant-colonel's shoulder-straps when Mack laid them down at the close of the school term.

“There's lots of uneasy fellows here this term,” continued Mack. “Hadn't we better let up on them a little and give them a chance to show their hands ?”

Don, remembering that there was a time, and it was not so very long ago either, when he would

have been prompt to "show his hand" if his officers had "let up" on him in the slightest degree, answered that he couldn't think of it. He had learned that a student who behaved himself, and who could look his mother in the face when he went home to spend his vacations, had a clearer conscience and a mind that was much more at ease than one who was constantly setting himself up in opposition to lawful authority, and he was resolved that there should be no breaking of the rules that term if he could help it.

"But just think how full last term was crowded of fun and excitement, and how very dull and uninteresting this one is by comparison," said Mack, in a doleful voice. "First we had a chase after Huggins."

"That didn't amount to much," said Don. "It was soon over."

"But still it was exciting while it lasted. The tramp who stole Huggins's money might have made an end of you with that knife of his if you hadn't been a good swordsman. Then came the strikes and the fight with the rioters at Hamilton Creek bridge, and after that Enoch Williams woke us up with his runaway expedition, and gave

us a chance to take a week's sail on the bay. What have we had to keep our blood in motion this year? Not a thing."

"Does the unusual quiet worry you?" asked Don.

"No, but it makes me tired. I am heartily sick of this eternal study and drill, and I should like to go somewhere and do something. I was in hopes that your friend Lester Brigham would be up and doing before this time; but he seems to have gone to sleep like the rest of the discontented ones, and I don't believe we shall have a single thing to break the monotony of the school routine during the year."

"There will be your class dinner on the 31st of the month," suggested Don.

"But what does the class dinner amount to?" exclaimed Mack. "A lot of students, following the example set them by their fathers, who, perhaps, had no better way of passing the time, hire a hall, or get together in the dining-room of a hotel at Hamilton, stuff themselves with things that they might better let alone, make a few speeches in which they pledge undying friendship to one another, and when the term is ended they separate

and go their several ways, plunge into some business or profession and perhaps never think of the matter again. And that reminds me that our committee ought to report at the meeting to-night. Let's go down and see if they have come back yet."

The committee to which Mack referred was composed of three boys belonging to the first class, who had been sent up to Hamilton with full power to make all arrangements for the coming dinner, which was intended to be a grand affair. More than that, they took with them a large package of notes from the committee on invitation, addressed to prominent citizens of Hamilton, including the commanding officer of the 61st and his staff. The members of this committee had just come from the depot, and the young officers found them gathered about the big stove in the hall, making an informal report of their day's work to a few boys in their own class, regardless of the fact that several students who were members of other classes were loitering about within earshot. But what did they care for that? The graduating class had always made a great stir about their dinners, and no doubt this committee

took unbounded delight in tantalizing their auditors by telling, in glowing language, of the good things they were going to serve up to their Hamilton guests. It appeared that the class had a goodly sum of money in the hands of Colonel Mack, the treasurer, and that this committee had provided for the spending of every cent of it.

“You can see for yourself that this dinner of ours will exhaust all the resources of the *cuisine*,” said one of the committee, in a grandiloquent tone, after the chairman had told Mack just what he and his companions had done in the city during the day; “and the decorations of the banqueting hall will be correspondingly rich and elaborate.”

“In other words it will be bang-up,” observed the chairman. “All those nobby officers of the Sixty-first, to whom we presented the invitations in person, promised to be on hand, and the colonel said he would give them permission to appear in uniform. The boys said they wanted us to make this dinuer go ahead of anything that was ever heard of in this academy, and when it comes off they will find that we have obeyed instructions. It will be something to talk about, and there

won't be a hitch anywhere. We told Mr. Taylor to do his level best, and send all his bills to you as treasurer of the class, and he said it was all right."

The members of the committee talked in this way until the mouths of the boys who were standing around, and who had no part nor lot in the matter, began to water; then, having thoroughly warmed their fingers, they went up to their dormitories, and in a few minutes the lower hall was deserted by all save a single student, who paced back and forth with his hands in his pockets, and his eyes fastened thoughtfully on the floor. It was Wallace Ross, Lester Brigham's room-mate, who, as we said, had been "gated" for thirty days for some violation of the rules.

Ross, who was now spending his second year at the academy, was much such a fellow as Enoch said Lester Brigham was—he was all talk and no do. Unfortunately the world is full of such boys. They make great calculations concerning the future, tell big stories of the things they intend to do at no distant day, and there they stop. They set their mark high, but make no honest, persevering effort to attain to the object of their

desires, it being so much easier to think and plan than it is to act.

Ross had entered the academy with the laudable determination of beating every student there. He had assured his friends before he left home that when they saw him again, they would see him wearing an officer's uniform. Not even a first sergeant's warrant would satisfy him, for his ambition was to carry a sword instead of a musket. He wanted to jump from the ranks, over the heads of all the fellows above him, and land in a captain's place the first time trying. Don Gordon had proved that such a thing could be done, for at the close of the last term he had exchanged his musket and knapsack for the major's shoulder-straps; but then Don had worked for his promotion, and that was something Ross was not willing to do. In less than a week after he signed the muster-roll, he found that he had been woefully mistaken in the opinions he had formed of the academy, and of the boys who belonged to it. The majority of them were quite as smart as he was; and after he had been "hazed" a few times at "setting up" by a corporal who thought he needed a little wholesome

discipline, and the fencing-master had railed at him in his broken English because he did not pay more attention to business during the hours that were devoted to the broadsword exercise, and some of the other teachers had reported him for his failures in the recitation-room—after all these disagreeable things had happened to him, the boy's eyes were opened to the fact that the Bridgeport Military Academy was not at all the school he had been looking for; but he could not get out of it with his father's consent, so he set himself to work to get through the course with as little trouble as he could. Other boys openly declared that that was what they intended to do, and they seemed to get on quite as well as he did.

The lieutenant-colonel's uniform was a very handsome one, and Wallace Ross was not the only student who longed to wear it. When that official appeared in full dress all eyes were fastened upon him—that is, all except those belonging to a few disappointed aspirants. These generally turned their backs and made disparaging remarks about the uniform and the boy who wore it. Ross, who had given up all hope of wearing that uniform, felt very bitter toward Colonel Mack.

"Just notice that squatty little jackanapes," he would often say to those around him, especially if they chanced to be boys of his own stamp. "Don't he cut a pretty figure in that dress? Just see him strut, will you? I should judge by the airs he throws on that his father must be worth as much as a dollar and a half."

If Mack had told Ross and the other disappointed ones just how he felt when he came out almost covered with gold lace, they would not have believed him. Mack, to quote from his friends, was as "common as an old shoe," and he liked to be comfortable.

"See how everybody stares at me," said he to his chum, one day. "I must look like a scarecrow in these duds."

"You don't, either," exclaimed Don, with some indignation in his tones. "You look splendid."

"Well," replied Mack, with a sigh of resignation, "if they will give me back my old blouse and my captain's shoulder-straps, they can keep their finery, or give it to some one who appreciates it more than I do."

Wallace Ross cordially hated these two boys simply because they had worked their way to

the top of the ladder while he was still standing at the foot. He was one of those who would have been glad to see them disgraced before the whole school. That was something that could not be brought about by any scheming or effort on his part ; but he believed that he could deeply wound Colonel Mack's feelings, and through him those of Don Gordon. The conversation he had just overheard had suggested to him the way. After he had taken a few turns up and down the hall, revolving the matter in his mind all the while, his eyebrows began to relax, then a triumphant smile overspread his face, and finally he threw back his head and laughed heartily. The sound startled him. He looked hastily up and down the hall, and was greatly relieved to find that there was no one in sight.

"It can be done," said he, to himself, as he made his way to his room. "I just know it can be done if there is any one in our crowd who has brains enough to manage it, and if Lester is spoiling for a chance to take those shoulder-straps down a peg or two, as he says he is, he can't refuse to attempt it."

Ross did not belong to "our crowd" yet. In

accordance with his promise Lester had said a good word for him to Enoch and the rest, not forgetting to mention the fact that Ross had money that the superintendent knew nothing about, that he was quite willing to spend a portion of it every chance he got, and Enoch had promised to remember him. He did remember him too, every time he found his funds running low, and on this particular afternoon he and Lester and a few chosen spirits were down at Cony Ryan's, filling up on pancakes which Enoch paid for with the dollar he had borrowed of Ross that morning.

The latter went to his room full of his new idea, and walked up and down the floor with his hands behind his back while he matured his plans. He saw a thousand and one difficulties in his path, but he found a way to surmount or get around every one of them, and when Lester came in he was all ready to astonish him.

That night after supper the boys belonging to the first class, which was to graduate at the end of the term, made their way toward their recitation room ; and when they were all assembled and the secretary had called the roll, the door was locked to keep out intruders. It being the regu-

lar business meeting several reports were submitted, but the one in which the students were the most interested was the one presented by the committee of arrangements, some of whose members had passed the day in Hamilton. The chairman went more into details than he did while he was warming his fingers in the hall, and when he ceased speaking and had answered a few questions that were propounded to him by different members of the class, the boys told one another that their banquet would be talked of when some of those who sat down to it were forgotten. After that the secretary was instructed to write to Mr. Taylor, the well-known caterer, who had furnished all the big dinners for the military and civic societies of Hamilton as long as Cony Ryan had sold pancakes and maple syrup on the shores of the big pond, and to Mr. Colson, the proprietor of Clarendon Hall, stating that the action of the committee was approved by the class, and that if it were thought best to make any changes in the programme, they would be duly informed of the fact. When the motion had been acted upon, one of the students arose and said :

“It may not be amiss to inform the Chair that

it has been handed down in the archives of our venerable and time-honored institution that, in the days gone by, certain members of the second class, prompted by the spirit of discord, undertook to come roots on the graduating——”

“The Chair is unable to comprehend the gentleman’s language,” interrupted the boy president, in a tone of rebuke.

“Mr. Chairman,” continued the student, “I beg to recall the words, and to state, in all seriousness, a fact which the gentlemen present may not know anything about. I have heard my uncle say that while he was a member of this school, he and a few other boys in his company undertook to see that the members of the graduating class had considerable trouble in eating their dinner after they had provided it; and so well did they perform their work, that it was more by good luck than good management that the dinner was eaten at all. How my honored relative and his fellow-conspirators accomplished this, I don’t know. To be candid, he positively refused to enlighten me on that point, fearing, no doubt, that I would at some time attempt a similar plot myself; but that, sir (here the eloquent speaker placed one hand under

his coat-tails and waved the other gracefully in the air), is something I should scorn to do."

The interested listeners all laughed outright when they heard this. A bigger spirit of mischief than Bob Walker (that was the student's name) could not have been found in Bridgeport. When he first entered the academy he was in arrest nearly all the time, and everything that was done in violation of the rules was laid to his charge. But that was all over now, and Bob was the captain of his company.

"Now I don't know, Mr. Chairman, that we are in danger of being interfered with in any way," continued Bob, becoming serious again, "but Lester Brigham and Enoch Williams have opened our eyes to the fact that they can throw the whole school into a turmoil if they set about it in earnest, and it might be well to be on the safe side. Therefore I suggest that the secretary be requested to incorporate in the communications he has been instructed to write to Messrs. Taylor and Colson a statement to the effect that if any changes are made in the plan of arrangements, they will be duly notified by a committee, and not by letter."

Being requested to put his suggestion into the

form of a motion it was carried, together with several others that followed close upon the heels of it, all having the same object in view, namely: to guard against treachery and outside interference. When they got through, the sharpest of the students couldn't think of a single thing that had been omitted. They seemed to have provided for every emergency.

There being no further business to transact, the meeting adjourned, and shortly after the students had left the room, an orderly came in and put out the lights. Presently there was a slight rustling under one of the benches, and a couple of dark forms crept out into the aisle and groped their way toward the door, which they opened just an inch or two, so that they could reconnoiter the lower hall. There were several boys in there, but they were gathered about the stove at the farther end, and when the two spies—for such their stealthy movements proclaimed them to be—thought they could do so without being observed, they stepped out into the hall, closing the door softly behind them, and made their way up the stairs toward their dormitories.

After this, for some unaccountable reason, affairs

seemed to run with unwonted smoothness. The lazy students and the shirks disappeared as if by magic. The smart ones in Enoch's crowd stood high in their deportment and studies, and even the dull fellows, like Lester Brigham, astonished their teachers by coming into the recitation rooms with perfect lessons. It was a common saying among the boys that the faculty always grew good-natured as class-day approached, and this state of things made them smile all over. Many passes were granted for the 31st, and a few of the students who lived in Hamilton, but who did not belong to the graduating class, were granted permission to go home for the day. The passes that were given to the others allowed them to go no farther than the village. The boys in the graduating class had seen no reason for making any changes in their programme, and consequently no special committee had been sent to Hamilton ; but immediately after breakfast on the morning of the 31st, the three students who had thus far done all the work devolving upon the committee of arrangements, presented themselves before the president of the class to receive their final instructions. They were dressed in their best uniforms, and in

their valises they carried their epaulets, body-belts, and a few other articles of ornament which they could not wear under their overcoats. They were going to the city. They wanted to make sure that Mr. Taylor had got the dinner up in good shape, and that Mr. Colson had made use of the bunting they had sent him to decorate Clarendon Hall in a manner befitting the occasion. More than that, they were to provide for the reception of their class at the railroad depot.

“See everybody yourselves, and take no one’s word for anything,” said the president, earnestly. “Call on Mr. Taylor and inspect the dinner as far as you can ; then go up to the hall, give it a good looking over, and if you see anything that don’t suit you, *make* it suit you the first thing you do. Be sure that the music is ready, and telegraph me as soon as you can whether or not everything is all right, according to your previous instructions.”

“Oh, we shall find everything all right,” said one of the committee, confidently. “Don’t you worry about that. We were careful to tell those men, in plain language, just what we wanted, and as they have reputations to sustain, and know that they are going to get their own price for their

work, they will take as much interest in having the affair go off smoothly as we do. Good-by. You will hear from us in about two hours."

The committee hurried out to catch the train, and the president went back to his room to give his uniform another good looking over, and to make sure that not the smallest particle of dust had settled on it during his brief absence.

Class-day had always been observed as a sort of half-holiday, and this one was no exception to the rule. There was a little studying done, and the very small number of those who had failed in their recitations on the previous day, were required to make up for it before they could mingle with their companions in the halls and see what was going on. The boys in the first class were excused from duty, and all they had to do was to make themselves look pretty. At least that was what Colonel Mack said.

"You will have all this to go through with next year, Gordon," added Mack. "Your class must make it a point to have an extra good dinner."

"What concern is it of yours whether we do or not?" demanded Don.

"Why, I shall be one of the alumni then, and I expect to help eat it," was Mack's reply.

"Wouldn't it be becoming in you to wait until you get an invitation?" asked Don.

"Oh, I'll get *that*," answered Mack, confidently.

"From whom, pray?"

"From you, of course."

"No, sir," said Don, emphatically.

"And why not? Is it because I don't invite you to go to Hamilton with me to-day? Can't help it, my fine fellow. No student, unless he belongs to the graduating class, can sit down to a dinner like this. That's the law. It is unwritten, but, like the common law of England, it's binding."

"Well," said Don, speaking seriously this time, "I certainly hope you and the rest of the boys will see no end of pleasure. You have been looking forward to this day for four long years, and I trust it will pass away without the smallest incident to mar your enjoyment."

"Thank you," said Mack. "The same to your own class-day, when it arrives. I do hope there will be no hitch in the programme; that is the only thing I stand in fear of. It always puts me on nettles when these formal things do not go off

as they ought. I feel like sneaking out and hiding myself. It would be just awful if anything should happen to-night, for we have received favorable replies from about a hundred and fifty invited guests—Come in," he cried, in response to a knock at the door.

"I'll do it," answered the cheery voice of the president, who entered the room, carrying a brown envelope in his hand. "I feel better," he continued, as he helped himself to a seat on the sofa beside Don. "Here's a dispatch from Blake, and he says that everything is O. K. That means that the dinner could not be improved, that the hall looks just as it should, and that the band will be at the depot to meet us. Could anything be more satisfactory?"

Colonel Mack and his chum thought not. The dinner was really a big undertaking, there were many chances for unpleasant and even disagreeable things to happen, and it was very gratifying to them to receive the assurance from those who were on the ground that their plans were working smoothly.

CHAPTER VII.

A SURPRISE.

THERE were two passenger trains that passed through Bridgeport every afternoon going toward Hamilton, one being the regular mail, which was due at five o'clock, and returning, left the city at four in the morning. This was the train the graduating class intended to take, the committee having chartered two extra cars to accommodate the members. The other was the lightning express, which passed through the village at one o'clock, and returned at four in the morning. This was the train on which they were to come back. We mention these facts to assist us in explaining some unexpected and astounding incidents which happened in connection with this particular dinner.

The boys in the first class were impatient, as live boys always are when they are waiting for

something, and after they had got into their best uniforms, they hardly knew what to do with themselves. Some of the very uneasy ones strolled about the buildings and grounds in companies of twos and threes, while others, and these were the fellows who had the most self-control, read away the time in the library. Here and there, as far away from his companions as he could get, might have been seen a student who was walking about with rather an abstracted air, now and then giving his hand a flourish, and all unconscious of the fact that every one of his movements was observed and commented upon by interested spectators, who would be sure to laugh at him afterward. These were the boys who were expected to propose and reply to some of the toasts of the evening.

The hours dragged their weary length away, and at last a sergeant appeared upon the steps and roared out the command for the first company to fall in. Almost before he opened his lips there was a rush made for the armory, and when Captain Walker led his company into it, with Colonel Mack marching in the ranks like any private, he found all the students assembled to see him off—

that is, all those about the building who were not on duty. Eighty or more boys were out on leaves of absence for the day.

There were no pale and anxious faces among the young soldiers now as there were the last time a company was marched out of that same armory to go to Hamilton ; for these boys were not armed, and neither were they going to the city to encounter an infuriated mob who would welcome them with a shower of coupling-pins and brickbats. They were going to—well, they expected a very different sort of reception. They got it, too, but after all it was not just such a one as they had confidently looked for.

Everything being in readiness, the company moved out of the armory, and, led by the band, took up its line of march for the depot, the four dignified professors, who were to represent the faculty at the coming banquet, riding sedately at a respectful distance in a close carriage. When the ponderous iron gates closed behind the company, Don Gordon, for the first time, found himself in command of the academy battalion. Before twenty-four hours more had passed over his head, he declared, with much gesticulation and many

expletives, that if he had possessed the full powers of a military commander he would have court-martialed and hanged a score or more of fellows, who that night performed an exploit that astonished everybody. It did more; it struck everybody motionless and speechless with amazement, and, what was rather singular, the particulars of it had the same effect upon all who heard them. The listener first looked and acted as if he could not believe the evidence of his senses, and then threw back his head and gave expression to his feelings in a hearty peal of merriment. Even Don Gordon, angry as he was, rolled on his bed and laughed until his sides ached and his eyes were filled with tears.

The students enjoyed their ride to Hamilton, and made noise enough for so many veteran soldiers. When the train approached the city limits they quieted down, drew on their white gloves, picked up their valises, and held themselves in readiness to disembark as soon as they received the word of command.

"Dayton," said Captain Walker to his first lieutenant, "you get the boys out of the cars, and I will go with Mack and the president to hunt up

Blake and see where the music is. As soon as I find it, I will come back to you."

"It seems to me that it would have been the right thing for that band to pipe up as soon as our train came within sight of the depot," observed Dayton. "We pay them for blowing for us, and we want to get all the music we can out of them. They ought to give us our money's worth; doesn't it strike you that way?"

Captain Walker said it did, adding that he thought there was something strange about it. Colonel Mack and the anxious president thought and said the same. Looking out at the car windows as the train moved slowly into the depot, they could see that there were many people moving about, but there was not a cadet gray or a union blue overcoat in sight; and the big building, which ought to have been resounding to the enlivening strains of martial music, echoed only to the murmur of voices and the tread of hurrying feet.

"I don't understand this matter at all," exclaimed the president, as he and his two companions sprang from the car and looked around for the faithful and energetic chairman of the committee of arrangements.

“There’s something wrong,” observed Mack, who had a way of looking disagreeable things in the face.

“For goodness sake, don’t say that,” replied Captain Walker, whose countenance had assumed a very serious expression during the last few minutes.

“Well, then, where is Blake?” demanded Mack. “You never knew him to slip up like this before, did you? It is true that committees and bands of music have been behind time before to-day, but somehow——”

Mack did not finish the sentence, but what he didn’t say was much more expressive than what he *did* say. With one accord the three boys hurried toward the waiting-room. The first familiar face they saw as they entered it was that of one of the “nobby” staff officers of the Sixty-first—one of the hundred and fifty who had returned a favorable reply to their invitation. The boys thought it high time he was in uniform if he intended to help them eat their dinner, but here he was in citizen’s clothes! and the papers and blank-books he carried in his hand seemed to indicate that he was attending to business. When he

saw Mack and his companions approaching, he stopped and looked at them in the greatest astonishment.

"How does this come, colonel?" said he, as he took Mack's outstretched hand, and shook it cordially. "You're left, as sure as the world."

"Left!" repeated Mack. "I don't know what you mean?"

"Why, I mean that you won't eat any class dinner to-night," answered the staff-officer, glancing at his watch. "It is set for seven o'clock, and here it is half-past six already."

"You mean that it was set for eight o'clock," the president ventured to suggest, while a very dim conception of the situation began to creep into Mack's mind.

"No, seven," insisted the officer, "and that's the reason I couldn't attend as I had hoped to do. Your committee didn't notify me of the change in the time until it was too late for me to make arrangements."

An expression of the greatest consternation overspread the faces of Mack's two companions. The latter shut his teeth hard, and spoke with a calmness that surprised himself.

“What kind of a looking crowd was it who notified you of a change in our programme?” he asked.

“Oh, it was a good-looking committee—sharp, bright fellows; and I think, on the whole, that they would compare very favorably with the cadets I see before me,” answered the officer, with a smile. “They got the dinner to the transfer depot all right, and made a very pretty appearance as they marched through the city, led by our favorite cornet band. But how in the world are you boys going to get to Bordentown? There’s no train before midnight, and the fastest horse in Hamilton could not take you over there in time to—Why, colonel, what’s the trouble?” exclaimed the officer; for Mack had darted away at the top of his speed toward the telegraph office. “I declare I believe it’s a beat.”

“You may well say that,” replied Captain Walker, as he and the president ran after Mack. “If the Sixty-first is sent for to-morrow to quell a riot at the academy you need not be at all surprised.”

“I want to send off a dispatch,” shouted Colonel Mack, as he rushed into the telegraph office,

and stamped up and down the floor, swinging his fists in the air. "Hurry up. I'll write it out afterward."

The boy, who happened to be in charge of the office, no doubt thought that the intruder had gone crazy all on a sudden ; but he sat down to his desk without making any comments, and told the excited young colonel to go ahead.

"J. H. Taylor, Bordentown," shrieked the telegraph, following Mack's hurried and rather incoherent dictation. "Stop that dinner ; it is a fraud. Choke off those boys. Kick them out of doors. The whole thing is an outrageous swindle."

While Mack was wondering what earthly good it would do him and the rest of the boys if these instructions were obeyed, he dictated another dispatch to his friend Don Gordon, which ran as follows :

"That villain Lester Brigham has got the weather-gauge of us. He and his crowd have stolen our dinner and carried it off to Bordentown with the intention of eating it themselves."

By this time Mack had so far recovered from his rage and excitement that he could write out

and pay for these two dispatches, after which he went down stairs to see what the class thought about it. The members had broken ranks and were gathered in a body around their captain and president, who had just brought them the news. If we were to say that they were amazed and angry, we should not begin to tell how they felt. As they could not say anything that would do the subject justice, the most of them kept still ; but they clenched their fists and nodded their heads at one another, and if Lester and his crowd had been within reach at that moment, it is doubtful if their officers could have restrained them.

“I would give up my chances for graduating at the end of the term, if I could have just one minute’s private interview with Lester Brigham,” said one of the students, who was walking about wringing his hands as if he were in great bodily distress. “I don’t think his mother would know him when I got through with him.”

“I wish there was some way for us to get to Bordentown,” exclaimed another. “Wouldn’t we drive those fellows away from that table and out of the windows in short order? Great Scott!

Just think how many of our friends have traveled hundreds of miles at our invitation, only to be disappointed !”

These words drove even the cool-headed ones among the students almost frantic. There was no loud talking, no riotous demonstration, and a stranger might have passed close by them without knowing, from their words and actions, that there was anything the matter with them. The military discipline to which they had so long been subjected, restrained them in some measure ; and besides, as much as they wanted to fight, they could see nothing to oppose them. If Lester and his company of adherents had entered the depot at that moment, it is probable that the sight would have had a very demoralizing effect upon them. Just then one of their number, who had been holding an earnest conversation with one of the railroad men, came hurrying up.

“I say, fellows,” he exclaimed, “if Lester and his party leave Bordentown at all during the next twelve hours, they will have to take the three o’clock train, which will bring them in here in time for the lightning express.”

“Good !” cried all the boys, in a breath.

That was all they said, but it was plain that they understood one another. Their captain, who happened to overhear these remarks, understood them also, and he at once hurried away to lay the matter before his superior officer.

“Look here, Mack,” said he, in a suppressed whisper. “There will be the very mischief to pay if we don’t get out of here before four o’clock. The boys expect Lester and his party to return from Bordentown at that hour, and they have made up their minds to give them a good pounding.”

“That would never do—never in the world,” replied Mack, in a tone of anxiety. “Such a high-handed proceeding on the part of the members of our class would be an everlasting disgrace to them, as well as to the school. We’ll nip that little arrangement in the bud. It will make the boys mad at us at first, but they will thank us for it after they have had time to cool off a little. I, for one, am not half as angry as I was a few minutes ago, and, now that I think of it, it was a pretty sharp trick on Lester’s part, and we have all seen the time when we would have done the same thing, if we had been bright enough to think

of it. I'll warrant that Don Gordon is laughing fit to split, and that he feels like punching his own head because he did not propose something of the kind when he was running with Tom Fisher and that crowd. But we can't have a free fight here in the depot, and we won't, either. Now, Walker, you stay here, and don't allow a single boy out of your sight until we come back. The president and I are going up to the hotel to talk to the superintendent about it, and while we are gone, you must be very careful what you say in the hearing of the boys. Some of them are too highly exasperated to be reasonable, and if they should find out that they are not to be allowed the privilege of fighting Lester and his men, they would slip out into the city and lie in wait for them. If they begin to act in a way to arouse your suspicions, order the last one of them into our two cars, and keep them there until we return."

"Very good, sir," replied Captain Walker, raising his hand to his cap. "But between you and me," he added, in a lower tone, "I really wish our boys could interview Lester and his party before we go back to the Academy."

“It is about the neatest trick I ever heard of,” said Colonel Mack, as he and the president hurried away to pour their sorrows into the sympathizing ear of the superintendent, and to tell him of the plot the first-class boys had entered into to take summary vengeance upon the despoilers of their feast when they came in on the Bordentown train. “Those fellows must be as well posted in our plans as we are.”

“Of course they are,” was the reply. “Otherwise they could not have sent me that telegram which purported to come from Blake, and which assured me that everything was ‘O. K.’”

“That’s so; where in the world is Blake now?” exclaimed Mack; and apparently forgetting that Blake was the very boy they had been wishing for ever since the train came into the depot, he and the president stopped in their hurried walk and looked all around in search of him. “Say,” added Mack, a moment later, “I have my own ideas regarding the manner in which this trick was sprung upon us——”

“So have I,” interrupted the president.

“And I want you to remember what I say,” continued Mack. “When we get to the bottom

of this day's work, you will hear some things that will make you open your eyes. What do you see to interest you so much?"

Receiving no reply from his companion, who, having come to a sudden halt, was shading his eyes with his hand and gazing intently at some object he saw in the distance, Mack also stopped, and looked in the same direction. Before him was the river, along whose banks ran Hamilton's principal business street. Near the head of it was the hotel toward which they were hastening, and a short distance farther on stood the transfer-depot. All the passengers who came in on the main road, and who were bound for Bordentown or points farther north, were conveyed from one depot to the other by an omnibus line, while the luggage and freight were taken over on drays.

Directly in front of the transfer-depot was the bridge that crossed the river, and beyond it, for three miles at least, the track was almost as straight as an arrow. The boys could plainly see every rod of it from where they stood. As Mack looked up he saw, coming into view around the first bend in the road, a locomotive which seemed to be moving with terrific speed. Mack didn't

see anything surprising in that, not even after he had taken a second look, and discovered that the engine was drawing a couple of flat cars that were heavily loaded with something; and it did not take him long to tell his companion so.

"I know that a wild-cat train is not an unusual sight," exclaimed the latter, "but something tells me that we are interested in the one we see before us. Just as you spoke, I saw a momentary flash in the engineer's cab, and I'll bet it was the reflection from a breast-buckle."

"Reflection of what?" demanded Mack.

"Why, light, of course."

"That's a good one. Why, man alive, if there was a breast-buckle in the cab, where is the light for it to reflect? The sun was hidden by those clouds an hour ago."

"I don't care if it was," said the president, decidedly. "Isn't the cab lighted up when the fireman opens the door to replenish the furnace? There! What do you say to that?"

Mack was so bewildered that he did not know what to say regarding some of the extraordinary things that happened during the next few seconds. First, the engineer whistled for the bridge, and

then for the station, but he did not "slow down," as he would have done under ordinary circumstances. He kept on at full speed, and this seemed to indicate that he was in a hurry. As the train drew nearer, the dense mass on the forward flat began to assume forms and shapes, and then Mack saw that it was composed of many different bodies, and that they were all in motion. Very soon these different bodies began to assume color as well as form, some showing blue and the others gray. Before Mack could give utterance to the words of astonishment that rose to his lips, he heard the warning notes of a bugle, such as the leader of a band gives when he desires to call the attention of his men, and an instant afterward the cheering strains of a triumphal march came floating across the river. If ever a band tried to talk, this one did. Its music gave the listening boys a very fair idea of the situation, and, as they afterwards declared, there was a whole column of good news in every note that came from its instruments.

Mack and his companion looked wonderingly at each other for a moment, and then they looked at the train again. Two objects, which bore some

resemblance to huge umbrellas, had been raised from the middle of the crowd on the forward flat, and were now slowly unrolling themselves. The first that was given to the breeze was the Star Spangled Banner, and the one that floated alongside of it was the white silk flag that bore the monogram of the Bridgeport Military Academy.

“What do you say now?” repeated the president, as soon as he could speak. “Blake and the other two members of the committee have stolen a march on Lester as sure as the world.”

Mack thought so too, but he had never dreamed of such good luck, and he wanted somebody to confirm him in his opinion.

“Do you really believe that they have brought our dinner back to us?” he asked.

“I know it,” was the emphatic response.

“And can we serve it up to our guests, and have everything go off just as we planned it?” continued Mack.

“Of course—that’s the very idea,” said the president, encouragingly.

“But how in the name of all that’s wonderful could Blake, with only two men at his back, get the better of Lester and Enoch and such a crowd

as they had with them?" inquired Mack, who, although he firmly believed that Blake had done that very thing, could not, for the life of him, imagine *how* he had done it. "There must have been at least thirty or forty fellows in Lester's party, and I shouldn't think they would permit themselves to be balked at the very last minute. Having got safely off with the dinner, why didn't they hold fast to it?"

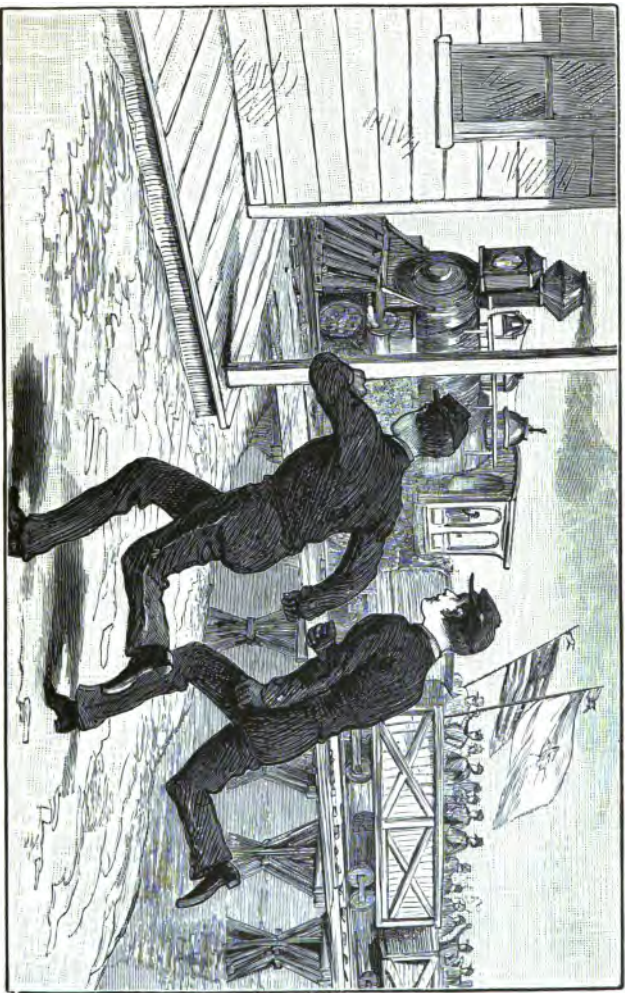
"I don't know anything about that," answered the president. "But that is our dinner on the rear flat, covered up with a tarpaulin, and I am positive of it. Now, what shall we do?"

"Let's first make sure that we are right in our suppositions, and then we will go to work and carry out our programme," replied Mack. "It really looks to me as though things were working in our favor, in spite of all Lester's efforts to prevent it; but if we should be disappointed after all—"

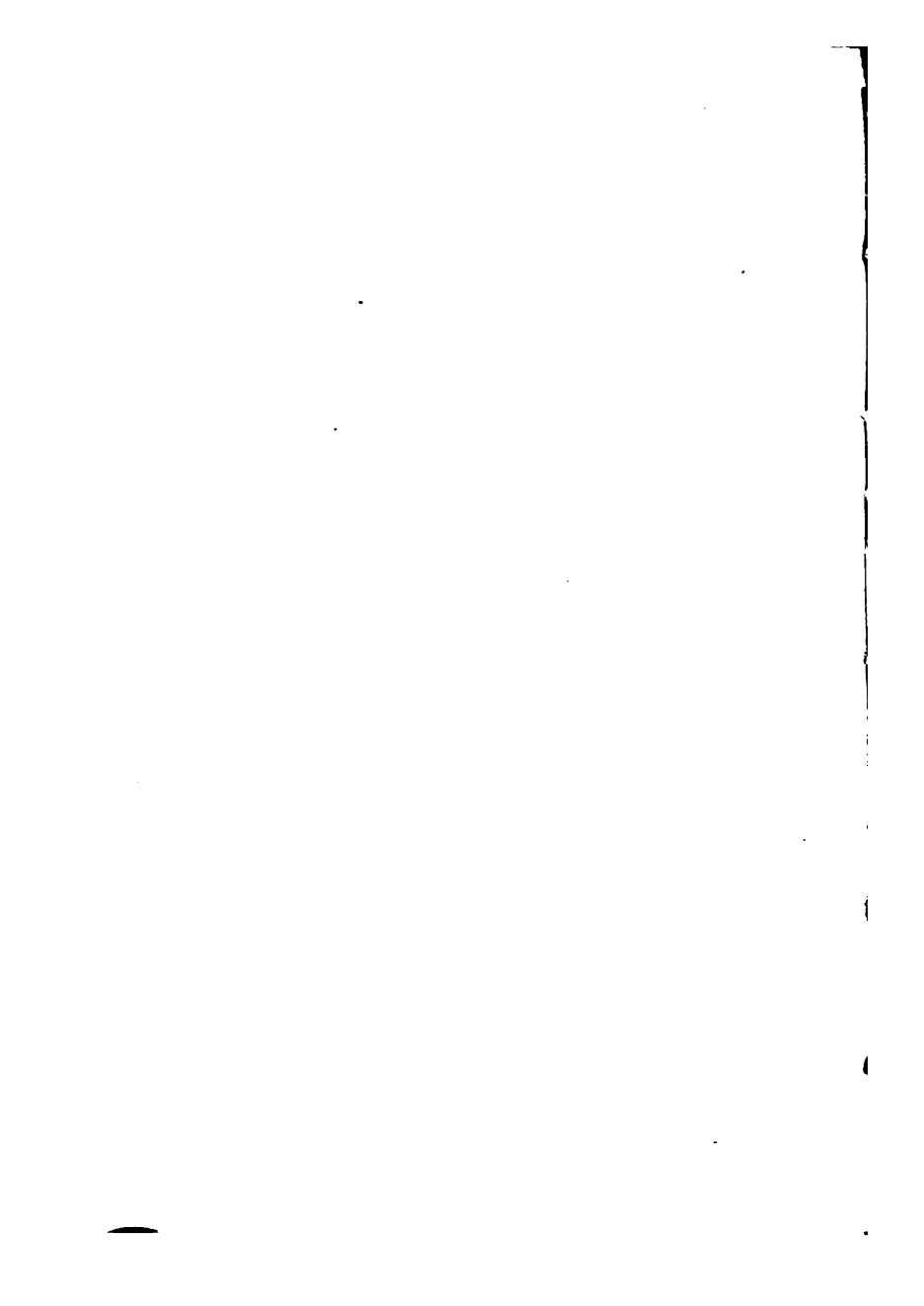
The president hastened to assure his companion that they were not going to be disappointed, and, in order to satisfy himself on that point at the earliest possible moment, he set out for the depot at the top of his speed, Mack following close at his heels. The train had by this time crossed the

bridge, and as it disappeared through one of the huge doorways, a shout arose from the inside of the building—a shout so loud that it effectually drowned the music of the band. The boys were greatly astonished at this, but they were so impatient to find some one who could explain everything to them, that they did not stop to ask each other any questions. They kept on with increased speed, and when they dashed into the depot, they found that the noisy greeting they had heard came from a company of railroad men, assisted by a crowd of professional hangers-on—men and boys who always run to the station whenever they hear the whistle of an approaching train.

The most of these men and boys had seen Lester and his company when they marched through the city that morning, led by the band, and, at the time, they thought that everything was just as it should be—that Lester and the rest were first-class boys, as they pretended to be, and that they had a right to the good things which Mr. Taylor had so carefully prepared, and which were following behind them, loaded on drays ; and it was not until the afternoon train came in, bringing Captain Walker and his men, that the citizens of Hamil-



THE RACE FOR THE CLASS DINNER.



ton learned how neatly the members of the graduating class had been outwitted. Some of them laughed, and said that it served the young upstarts just right (the boys in the first class *did* throw on a good deal of style, as a general thing), while others could not have been more exasperated if they had been personally interested in the matter. They knew, too, of the steps that Blake had taken to turn the tables on those who had made off with the dinner (we shall tell all about it presently), and when the triumphant strains of the band told them that the quick-witted fellow had been successful in his endeavors, they could not resist the impulse to cheer him. Blake was the first boy who sprang out of the engineer's cab to greet Mack and his companion.

"Oh, fellows," he exclaimed, as he extended a hand to each of them. "Would you believe——"

"We know all about it, and are ready to believe almost anything," interrupted Mack. "But how did you get the dinner back? That's what we should like to have you explain."

"Can't stop to do it now—story's too long," answered Blake, hurriedly, at the same time pulling out his watch. "But this much I can say to you :

We've not a single instant to lose, but if we work fast and don't get in one another's way, we can make the dinner go off as if nothing had happened."

"Blake, you deserve a commission," exclaimed the president.

"That's what I think," was the modest reply. "By the way, where is the company?"

"Down to the other depot."

"All mad, I suppose?"

"That's not the word to use; they are more than mad. I hope you have not brought Lester or any of his crowd back with you."

"Not by a long shot," answered Blake, with a laugh. "We did not want to see them whipped. Now, you two get an omnibus, put the band into it and go down and march up the company. Leave the rest to me. The hall will be ready by the time you get there."

Blake had given abundant proof that he was equal to any emergency, and consequently Mack and his companion did not linger to offer advice or assistance. They found an omnibus and an express wagon, and as soon as the band had been crowded into them, the vehicles were driven at full speed toward the lower depot.

CHAPTER VIII.

A DESPERATE UNDERTAKING.

LEAVING Mack and his companions to wonder at Blake's skill and cunning, and to rejoice over the unexpected return of their dinner, let us go back to Lester Brigham, whom we left locked in his dormitory in company with his friend, Wallace Ross.

If the reader will recall the conversation that took place at Cony Ryan's that afternoon, he can readily imagine that Lester was in just the right mood to do something desperate. Cony had intimated very plainly that he was a boy of one idea, and had also given it as his opinion that, although Lester was the acknowledged leader of his set (we know he wasn't; he was only the tool), he was totally unfit for the position. This made Lester so angry that he declared he would not eat any more pancakes in Cony's house. He would do

something to prove that he was not a boy of one idea, and it would be something that would not put a red cent into Cony's pocket. He would teach that enterprising landlord that it wasn't policy to rail at a good customer because he did not run the guard every night ; but what should he do ? That was the question. His companions expected him to get up something that would afford them plenty of fun and excitement, but they might as well have told him to plan an expedition to the North Pole, for Lester's mind was utterly barren of ideas. Just in the nick of time, however, his room-mate came to his assistance, and Lester's reputation was saved.

“I don't know what you will think of my plan,” said Ross, after he had closed and locked the door, “but I am of the opinion that I have got hold of something that will create a bigger uproar than your runaway expedition did. You know that the boys in the first class are talking of having a dinner on the 31st. They have invited a good many guests, and intend to make it a grand affair ; but I should like to see the whole thing knocked into a cocked hat. I propose that we get a party of

good fellows together, and go up to the city and eat the dinner ourselves."

"Humph!" exclaimed Lester, who was greatly disappointed. "Is that all you have to offer? I thought from the way you acted when I came in that you had some grand idea in your head."

"Don't you call that a grand idea?" demanded Ross.

"No, I don't," snapped Lester, who was inclined to be angry as well as disappointed. "I think it would be a very tame undertaking. The boys would hoot at me if I should suggest it."

"Tame!" echoed Ross. "Look here, Lester; you don't understand the matter at all. It would be a much more dangerous exploit than running off with a private yacht, for if the boys in the first class should find out that you thought of interfering with them in any way, they would give you such a thrashing that you wouldn't get over it in a month. You must know that there are a lot of prominent men invited to this dinner, and if anything should happen, just think how deeply mortified Mack and all the rest of them would be!"

Lester began to prick up his ears now, and to listen with some interest while Ross went on to

repeat the conversation he had overheard in the hall, when the committee of arrangements were warming their fingers at the stove, and to unfold the details of the scheme he had matured while awaiting Lester's return from Cony Ryan's. The longer Lester listened, the less inclined did he become to take part in it. His room-mate's idea could not be carried out, he was quite sure of that, because there were too many difficulties and altogether too much danger in the way; still he could propose it to Enoch, and when the latter refused to have anything to do with it, as of course he would the minute the matter was fully explained to him, Lester could say that he had kept his promise—that he had suggested something that would have afforded him and his friends any amount of fun and excitement, but that Enoch lacked the courage to take part in it.

“I wouldn't take part in it myself for a hundred dollars of any man's money,” said Lester, mentally, “and I don't believe Ross would be fool enough to do it, either. Good gracious! What would the fellows in the first class do to us? What would the teachers do? But I'll propose it, just as Don Gordon once proposed to capture

the butcher's big bull-dog, take him up to the top floor of the building and kick him down stairs, after tying a tin can to his tail. Don knew very well that there wasn't a boy in the world who would dare take a hand in a proceeding like that, and he suggested it, just because he wanted to make Tom Fisher and Duncan believe that he was a very brave fellow." Then aloud he added: "I'll tell you what I'll do, Wallace. If you will keep still and say nothing to nobody, I'll speak to Enoch about this idea of yours and tell you what he thinks."

Ross looked disappointed; he did not at all approve of this arrangement. If Enoch thought well of his scheme, he wanted him to know who was the originator of it. Lester had no difficulty in reading the thoughts that were passing through his room-mate's mind, and he hastened to add:

"You see, Ross, that runaway expedition last term made our crowd famous, and there are a good many fellows hanging around us this year, hoping that if we get up another of the same sort, they will be invited to join us; but there are some among them whom we know we can't trust, and we have

about decided that we won't take anybody into our confidence."

"But you know you can trust me!" exclaimed Ross, with some indignation in his tones.

"Yes, I think we can; but the others may not think so, and the best thing you can do is to keep entirely in the background, and let me manage the matter in my own way. If you won't agree to it, you can go and see Enoch yourself. And if you do that," added Lester, mentally, "I'll knock the whole arrangement higher than the moon. I'll tell Colonel Mack of it the very first chance I get."

"But if Enoch thinks that my idea can be carried out I want to know it, so that I can have a hand in it myself," exclaimed Ross.

"Of course. I'll attend to that."

"Then I will agree to your proposition."

"All right. When I tell you there are some boys who are now recognized as members of our crowd, but whom we do not intend to take with us on any more picnics, you will see the necessity for keeping the matter a profound secret. Don't lisp a word to anybody, for, if you do, you may speak to the wrong fellow. I'll talk the scheme

up the best I know how, and tell you what conclusion we come to."

So saying, Lester left the room and hastened away in search of Enoch, whom he found in the hall in company with his inseparable friend, Jones. They saw and understood the wink that Lester gave them as he passed, and followed him out of the building to an unfrequented part of the grounds, where they could talk without fear of being overheard. Then Lester went into the details of his room-mate's plan, never once mentioning Ross's name, however, but leaving his auditors to infer that the idea was original with himself. He wanted them to say at the outset that they would not have anything to do with it, and he succeeded in making the difficulties and dangers of the undertaking stand out so prominently that he did not believe that any boy who was in his sober senses would willingly face them. Judge, then, how surprised he was when he saw the look of interest and enthusiasm which his glowing words called to Enoch's face, and felt the hearty embrace the boy gave him as he exclaimed, in delighted tones :

"Lester, you are a brick ! I knew you would

hit upon something grand if you were only given time to set your wits at work. This beats last year all to smash; don't it, Jones?"

"I should say so," replied the latter, as soon as he had somewhat recovered from his amazement. The whole scheme was so original and daring in its conception that he could not take it in all at once. "Lester could not suggest anything that would please me better if he were to think and plan for a month. If we can only carry it out—"

"Oh, we'll carry it out," interrupted Enoch, nodding his head in a significant way, as if he meant to convey the impression that he had suddenly conceived of a brilliant idea of his own. "Don't you worry about that."

Lester was so disgusted that he could only give a sickly smile in return for the beaming looks his companions bestowed upon him. The latter entered heartily into the spirit of the matter, and Lester, if he had dared, would have gone straight to Colonel Mack and exposed the whole thing. He was afraid to take part in it, and he was so mean that he did not want others to see any fun unless he could have the lion's share of it. His companions already showed a disposition to ignore

him entirely, and discussed with each other several plans for accomplishing their ends without once asking Lester to express his opinion regarding them.

"Won't Cony be surprised when he hears of it!" exclaimed Enoch, who was highly excited over the sport in prospect.

"I only wish it would take some money out of his pocket," snarled Lester, in reply.

"Why do you wish that?" demanded Enoch.

"Because I don't at all like the way he jawed me to-day," answered Lester.

"Oh, he didn't jaw you. He only wanted to wake you up, and I am glad to say that he succeeded in doing it. You never would have thought of this if Cony had not given you that friendly overhauling this afternoon. I wish that dinner was coming off this very night."

"Perhaps the other boys will not be in favor of it," Lester ventured to remark, and he hoped from the bottom of his heart that they would not.

"Yes, they will," said Enoch, confidently. "Mack and Gordon have made themselves obnoxious to a large party of fellows by the extraordinary airs they have thrown on since they

received their last promotion, and they will do anything to get even with either of them. Now, we have no time to waste. We must find out just what their plans are, and then we shall know how to go to work to defeat them. I believe they hold their regular business meeting to-night; and, Lester, you and Jones had better hide in the room and see if you can't hear something that will be of use to us."

The coolness with which Enoch desired others to put themselves in danger of a good beating while he kept out of the way of it, was refreshing. The promise of the lieutenant-colonel's shoulder-straps at the end of the term would not have induced Lester Brigham to go into that recitation room as a spy, and take his chances of detection, and he did not hesitate to say so in the plainest language he could command.

"But somebody must go," insisted Enoch.

"Then go yourself!" exclaimed Lester. "I had brains enough to get up the scheme, and now I'd like to see if you have enough to carry out the details."

"All right; I'll go," said Enoch, promptly; and thus another of Lester's hopes was dashed to

the ground. If all the boys in the crowd were as courageous as Enoch, and as willing to brave the wrath of the boys in the first class, it was plain that if they did not accomplish their object, it would not be because they were afraid to try.

"There's just this much about it," thought Lester; "I won't go, nor will I have the first thing to do with it. Since Enoch and Jones take so much interest in the scheme, they can work it out to suit themselves and bear the brunt of the punishment when it comes, and I will stay in the background. If I see that they are going to succeed, I will make it my business to break some of the rules so that I will be refused a pass."

If Lester had tried to carry this resolution into effect he would have found himself in trouble directly. The astute Enoch, who knew just how far to trust him, put the right interpretation upon the expression he saw on his face, and laid his plans accordingly.

"Well, Jones," said he, cheerfully, "you and I will act as spies to-night, and see if we can learn anything. In the meantime we'll not say a word

to any of the boys. We'll wait until we have something definite to tell them."

Just then the supper call was sounded, and as the three conspirators hastened to obey it, Enoch found opportunity to whisper to his friend Jones :

"Keep your weather-eye on Brigham. I don't like the way he looked. He means to back out, and, failing in that, to betray us."

"No!" exclaimed Jones, who was profoundly astonished.

"I am sure of it."

"Then what in the name of sense did he propose it for?" was the indignant inquiry.

"For fun—just because he wanted to show us that he could think up something in five minutes if he set about it in dead earnest. If he had had the least idea that we would so readily fall in with his scheme, he would not have said a word about it."

"He wanted to hear himself talk, did he? If I really believed it, I would report him."

"Don't do that," said Enoch, in some alarm, "for if you do you will spoil everything. We don't care whether he was in earnest or not. He has told us how we can see some fun, and if we

are sharp we will go ahead with it. What we want to guard against is, that he don't slip out, and leave us to stand the court-martial alone."

"Fall in for supper!" shouted the quartermaster sergeant; and the order put a stop to the conversation.

Enoch and Jones could not remember that they had ever been more excited than they were that night. As self-constituted spies they were about to undertake something that no boy in that school had ever before had the hardihood to attempt. They knew the temper of the students in the first class, and they knew, too, that they all belonged to a secret society that was as old as the academy itself. Its members were scattered all over the country. Its signs, grips, and pass-words, and all the other mysterious things belonging to it, had always been so closely guarded, that no one except a first-class boy had ever been able to obtain the faintest clue to them. A few inquisitive fellows had been bold enough to try it, but they were sorry for it afterward. They never did find out what passed inside the doors of the lodge-room, not even after they became members of the first class; and besides being forever debarred from all

the rights and privileges they would otherwise have enjoyed, they were soused in the big pond until all the curiosity and a good deal of their breath was washed out of them. Enoch and Jones knew all this, and yet they were about to go a step farther. They were going to allow themselves to be locked in one of the recitation-rooms with all the boys in the first class, and Jones, after he had taken time to consider the situation, began to feel as if he were on the point of entering a den of lions. Of course, he knew that none of the ceremonies of the lodge-room would be enacted at a business-meeting, but still it was possible that some of the students, believing themselves to be alone, might let fall some words or phrases that outsiders were not entitled to hear. He talked these matters over with Enoch after supper, and would have been delighted to see some signs of wavering or hesitancy on the part of his companion. But Enoch's eye lighted up and his face flushed, as the perils of the undertaking were portrayed to him, and the longer Jones talked, the brighter grew the light and the deeper the flush.

“I don't want to be black-balled when I get

into the first class," said Jones, as a clincher. "Why, just think of it, Enoch! Some of the best officers in our army and navy belong to that society, and if I should happen to meet any of them after I leave school, I should like to associate with them on equal terms."

"I don't want to be black-balled either," returned Enoch, "and, what's more, I don't intend to be. You need have no fears on that score, because we are not going to allow ourselves to be caught in the recitation room. I tell you, Jones," exclaimed Enoch, growing enthusiastic, "it will be the biggest thing that was ever thought of, and we must go through with it. The tuckout will be well worth eating—Mack and his crowd don't do things by halves—and if we succeed in stealing it, they will know in a minute that some of their secrets have leaked out; but won't it puzzle them to locate that leak?"

"Not if they find us hidden under the benches in the room in which they are holding their meeting," replied Jones.

But Enoch declared over and over again that they were not going to be caught, and spoke so confidently, and drew so glowing a picture of the

rage and mortification that would be displayed by the first-class boys when they discovered how they had been duped, that he succeeded in infusing a little of his own courage into his timid companion.

When the time for action arrived, Enoch, who ought to have been studying his lessons for the next day, came softly out of his dormitory and was promptly halted by Charley Porter, the guard who had charge of that floor until midnight. We have seen Charley before, and know that he was a boy after Enoch's own heart.

"Where are you going?" he asked, in a cautious tone, after he had looked up and down the hall to make sure that he and the spy were the only occupants of it. He knew at once that there was something afoot. He judged from Enoch's stealthy movements that guard-running was about to be inaugurated again, and wondered how any boy could have the temerity to attempt it. "You can't get out," he added, a moment later, "and if you make the effort, you will only get yourself and me into trouble. I am afraid to let you pass."

"It will be for only half an hour," was Enoch's

whispered response. "I assure you that I don't intend to go out of the building."

"What's going on?" demanded the guard.

"Something that will astonish you when you hear the full particulars of it," answered Enoch. "You know about that dinner, of course? Well, some of our old crowd have made up their minds that Mack and his friends shan't eat it—that we will eat it ourselves."

Charley smiled, and looked incredulous.

"It's a fact," said Enoch, earnestly. "Lester Brigham got up the scheme, and I think it a splendid one."

"It would be, if it could be carried out," replied the guard.

"It can be," said Enoch, in a confident tone. "In the first place we must learn all about their plans, and then we shall know just what to do."

"But how are you going to learn about their plans?"

"You know that the fellows in the first class hold their regular meeting to-night, I suppose? Well, Jones and I are going to hide in the room and listen to what that committee, who have been to the city to-day, have to say about the matter."

Charley Porter was really astonished now. He looked at Enoch as if he could hardly believe that he had heard aright, but he did not speak.

"I want to go down to the room now," continued the spy, "and as soon as the meeting is over I will come back—the very minute. I'll take care to see that you don't get into any trouble on my account."

The guard walked carelessly to the head of the stairs, took a survey of the hall below, and came back to Enoch before he spoke.

"I wouldn't do it for a million dollars," said he. "Don't you know that you will surely be left out in the cold when you get into the first class if you are caught in that room? I have heard it said that the school is made so very unpleasant for black-balled boys that they can't stay in it. They are glad to get out and go home as soon as they can."

"I know all about it," replied Enoch. "But if I am willing to take the risk it doesn't make any odds to you, does it?"

"None at all. You're sure that you will come back as soon as the meeting is adjourned, are you? Go on, then; but you had better take a friend's

advice and think twice before you go into that room."

Enoch, who had repeatedly told himself that nothing except detection should turn him from his purpose, gave the guard an assuring nod, and having satisfied himself that the way was clear, darted down the stairs that led to the next lower floor. There was a guard there, but Enoch stood in no fear of him. The fact that he had passed the sentry on his own floor, was taken by all the guards and patrols in the building as evidence that he had left his dormitory by permission of somebody who had a right to give it. So long as he kept clear of the teachers and remained in the building, he could move about without fear of being questioned.

When Enoch reached the lower floor he saw at a glance that there was not a single instant to be lost. There were a good many boys in the hall, and the number was being rapidly augmented by first-class fellows, who were coming out of their rooms to attend the meeting. Jones was there, pacing restlessly up and down, and awaiting Enoch's arrival with no little impatience. His face was pale, and he rubbed his hands together

so nervously that it was a wonder he did not attract attention.

"I thought you were never coming," said he, as Enoch approached. "Don't you think we had better give it up and find some other way of learning about their plans?"

"Can you suggest any other way?" asked Enoch, in reply.

Jones was obliged to confess that he could not. He had racked his brain in the hope of discovering some less dangerous mode of procedure, but his thinking had amounted to nothing. In fact, there was no other way in which the two spies could gain the information they desired than the one Enoch had selected, because the first-class fellows kept entirely to themselves while they were strolling about the building or grounds, and if a lower class boy had attempted to approach them when they were discussing their plans, he would have been ordered away without ceremony.

"Well, then," said Enoch, "I don't see any way for it but to hide under the benches and take the chances. We'll go one at a time, and I will take the lead. When you come in, give a low

whistle, and I will reply in the same way to show you where I am."

The spies separated and began walking up and down the hall, moving in opposite directions, and all the while drawing nearer to the door of the room in which the meeting was to be held. Watching his opportunity, when none of the boys who were gathered around the stove at the upper end of the hall happened to be looking that way, Enoch darted into the room and, in less time than it takes to write it, was concealed under one of the benches. A few minutes later Jones was crouching by his side, and none of the boys in the hall were the wiser for what they had done.

CHAPTER IX.

LESTER BRIGHAM'S STRATEGY.

“**N**OW we shall see what we shall see,” whispered Enoch, as he and Jones drew themselves into the smallest possible compass and waited, with beating hearts, to see what was going to happen. He spoke calmly enough, but the thought of what might be the result of his rash undertaking caused him no little anxiety.

“I wish Lester Brigham had been down in Mississippi before he proposed this thing to us, or else that he was here in my place,” whispered Jones, in reply. “Let’s get out of here while we have the chance.”

It is possible that Enoch would have agreed to this proposal if a way of retreat had been open to them; but before he could speak, the door opened, and the first-class boys came pouring in. It was too late to repent now.

It required all the fortitude Enoch possessed to carry him through the hour that followed, but he had come there to listen, and he did not forget to do it; while his timid companion, who was trembling in every limb, did not understand half a dozen words that were uttered in his hearing. Enoch was greatly amazed to learn that, if the idea of stealing the dinner which the graduating class had prepared for themselves and their friends was original with Lester Brigham, he was not the first student to propose it. In the years gone by, some of the mischief-loving fellows who then belonged to the academy had thought of the same thing, and, moreover, they had worked to such good purpose that they had given the first-class boys no end of trouble. This knowledge was so very encouraging to Enoch that he almost forgot that he was frightened; and when the meeting adjourned, and he and Jones stole out of the recitation room and made their way toward their dormitories, he told himself that if he were as smart as he thought he was, he could do more than make trouble for the graduating class—he could make Lester's scheme successful.

“There's one thing about it, fellows,” said

Enoch, as he and Jones stopped to exchange a few words with Charley Porter. "They are afraid of our crowd, and have taken all sorts of precautions to guard against any interference on our part. They couldn't have paid us a bigger compliment; could they, Jones?"

"N—no," stammered the latter. "Oh, yes; it was a splendid compliment," he added, trying to arouse himself. The fact was, he did not know what Enoch was talking about.

"I guess you didn't hear much that was said while you were in the recitation room," said Charley, who did not fail to notice how very pale Jones's face was and how his hands trembled. "You look and act as if you were scared half to death."

"And so I was," answered Jones, who knew that it would be of no use to deny the charge. "It makes me shiver all over when I think what those fellows would have done to us if they had caught us there. Fortunately they were all gathered in the front of the room, and that was the way we escaped discovery."

"You know that much about it, don't you?" said Enoch, with a laugh. "Never mind; I was

frightened myself, and when I went down stairs, Charley told me that he wouldn't act as a spy on Mack and the rest for a million dollars. Charley is nobody's coward, either."

"I hope I am not," said the guard, who was pleased with the compliment. "And I am not foolhardy, either. I don't call you two brave—I call you reckless."

"Perhaps we were," said Enoch. "At any rate I wouldn't do the same thing again for a dozen dinners. Now we are ready to talk the matter up among the fellows, and we will begin to-morrow."

Just then the deep tones of the big bell in the cupola rang through the building, and the spies, knowing that the officer of the guard would soon make his rounds, hurried toward their rooms; while Charley placed his hands behind his back and began pacing up and down the hall.

"*That* for you and your rules, Don Gordon," thought Enoch, snapping his fingers in the air and taking his seat at the study-table opposite his room-mate—a good little boy, who would have been frightened at the bare thought of deliberately violating any of the rules of school. Bert Gordon had fondly hoped that by "chumming" Enoch on

a studious, well-behaved fellow, he could induce him to mend his ways and devote himself to business, so that he could take a higher stand in the school; for Enoch was bright, and could have earned a lieutenant's shoulder-straps very easily, if he had only applied himself. If Bert had known what Enoch was thinking about now, he would have seen that his plan was not likely to work.

That was a long night to Enoch, who rolled restlessly about on his bed trying in vain to go to sleep. His mind was full of thoughts of the dinner and of the stratagems of which he intended to make use in order to secure possession of it (he knew that those he would take into his confidence would expect him to manage the matter), and the worst of it was, that he could not unburden himself to anybody before morning. When at last he sank into an uneasy slumber, he dreamed about the fun in prospect, and it was the first thing that came into his mind when the booming of the morning gun called him up to begin the duties of the day.

It will be remembered that after breakfast the students were allowed an hour in which to look over their lessons for the day, or to walk about the

grounds and watch guard-mount. It is hardly necessary to say that Enoch didn't do either. He devoted the time to making out a list of those who he thought would be willing to assist him in his enterprise, and Lester, Jones, and Charley Porter acted as his advisers. The two last were quite willing to look upon Enoch as the leading spirit, but Lester was not a little provoked at the matter-of-fact way in which the management of affairs was taken out of his hands. He could not have acted as leader himself, and he knew it; but he wanted the others to show him a little respect. Instead of that, they did not notice him at all; but at his request they added the name of Wallace Ross to those on the list, because they knew that they would have occasion to use some of the money with which Ross was so well supplied. After that each member of this self-appointed committee took a copy of the list, and the conspirators separated to "talk the matter up among the boys." Those to whom they spoke on the subject were, without exception, utterly confounded by the magnitude of the enterprise, and loud in their praises of the courage that Enoch and Jones had exhibited the night before. They said so much about it that

Lester became disgusted, and wished most heartily that he had gone into the recitation room himself, instead of allowing Jones to go.

"You seem to forget that I was one of those who saved the lives of the crew of the *Mystery*," observed Lester, who could not bear that the two spies should receive all the credit. "Where would they have been if it hadn't been for me? There wasn't a boy among you who had the pluck to volunteer to go in the dory with Enoch."

"What in the world has the wreck of the *Mystery* to do with stealing the dinner of the graduating class?" demanded one of the dozen or more boys to whom Lester talked in this way. "We know that you and Enoch showed courage that day, and saved us all from being sent down. We are much obliged to you, too, for proposing this thing, for we think we shall be able to get some sport out of it; but Enoch is the fellow to manage it. I, for one, have full confidence in him, but I won't have anything to do with it unless he is allowed to take command."

This was what all the boys said, and it made Lester very angry. More than once he told himself that the next time the crowd got hard up for

amusement they could go to somebody else to help them out, for he'd be shot if he would do it. He even thought seriously of telling Colonel Mack all about it ; and there is every reason to believe he would have done so, had it not been for the fact that he knew he would have to appear as the principal witness when the court-martial came off. As it was, he had to take his place in the ranks, so to speak, and look on and listen while others planned the campaign and issued the necessary orders.

We need not linger to unfold those plans or to repeat the orders, because it would take up too much time ; and, besides, everything will be made clear as our story progresses. It will be enough to say that Enoch proved himself to be a long-headed commander, and that when the time for action arrived, everything moved off as smoothly as he could have desired. There was not a single hitch anywhere—but he and his companions didn't eat the dinner.

We have said that class-day was always observed as a sort of holiday. By that we mean that all the students in the first class were granted leaves of absence for twenty-four hours, with permission to visit the city ; that those who lived in Hamilton

were allowed to go home for the same length of time; that the others who were worthy of them were granted passes, good "between gun and gun"—that is, between sunrise and sunset—and which permitted them to go as far as the village, and no farther; and that the academy was "garrisoned" only by the guard, and by those who, owing to some violation of the rules, had failed to obtain liberty. Enoch's crowd numbered nearly forty boys, and, for a wonder, every one of them got a pass. The superintendent was surprised when he came to examine the different reports that were handed in to him, for some of this crowd were the laziest and most turbulent boys in the school; but he complimented them on the marked improvement in their conduct and standing, and said he hoped it would be lasting.

"What would the old fellow think if he knew as much as we do?" said Enoch, to his friend Jones. "He won't hold us in so high esteem by this time to-morrow as he does now."

"Perhaps there won't be much of us left to esteem," replied Jones, dolefully. "We're playing a desperate game, Enoch, and I wish Brigham hadn't thought of it."

And Lester himself wished that Ross hadn't thought of it. He had studied and worked with the rest, hoping that before the time for action arrived, something would happen to upset Enoch's calculations; but every one of his plans worked smoothly, Lester had his pass in his pocket, and there was no backing out.

On the afternoon of the day immediately preceding the one that had been set for the banquet, four boys who lived in Hamilton and who belonged to the crowd, received permission to go home on a twenty-four hours' visit. Before they went they listened to some very explicit instructions from Enoch and his lieutenants, who reminded them that they had a most important part to perform, and that the success of the enterprise depended solely upon their discretion. Things were all right so far, Enoch said, and if they carried out their orders to the very letter, the members of the crowd would eat that dinner in spite of all that could be done to prevent it.

These emissaries, who departed on the one o'clock train, were accompanied as far as the depot by another student, whose object in loitering about on the platform for five long hours was not made

apparent, until the evening train from Hamilton thundered up to the station; then he walked up to the baggage-car, and some one on the inside handed him a letter addressed in a familiar hand to Enoch Williams. It must have been just what the student was waiting for, for as soon as he received it he jumped off the platform and set out post-haste for the academy. Enoch and a few of his trusted followers must have been expecting him, for they were the first boys he encountered after he passed the sentry at the gate.

“It’s from Endicott,” exclaimed Enoch, glancing at the writing on the envelope. “Fellows, this is what comes of having friends at court. If Endicott’s father were not an officer of the road, the baggage-master would not have troubled himself to bring this letter up to us. Now, let us see what those fellows have been doing since they went down to Hamilton. Some of you keep watch while I read.”

As the letter threw considerable light upon the plans of the conspirators, and contained some things the reader ought to know in order to fully comprehend what happened in the city the next day, we transcribe it entire. It ran as follows :

“DEAR ENOCH :

“Everything is working as smoothly as we could wish. Mr. Colson was very much surprised when I told him that we had decided to eat our dinner in Bordentown, and consequently should not want the hall, and so was Mr. Taylor, when we asked him if we could have the eatables at the transfer-depot in time for the afternoon train. But he didn't hesitate to promise that everything should be there, and neither did he ask any disagreeable questions. We have seen the leader of the band, and told him that we want him to be at the depot to meet the lightning express instead of the regular mail, and he has promised to be on hand and to go to Bordentown with us. My father has placed his carriage at my disposal for to-morrow afternoon, and I have arranged with Sam (that's the coachman's name) to meet Blake and his committee at the depot, and to take them as far out into the country as he can before he lets them out. The horses are very fast, and if Sam puts them to their speed, he ought to be able to take them as far as Grove farm. If he does, it will take them forever to find their way back to town, for the roads twist and turn about so be-

wilderingly that even those who are well acquainted with the woods sometimes get lost there. By the time they get back we shall be on our way to Bordentown, and they will have no means of following us, for we shall take the last train. The best joke of the whole was, that nobody suspected us. We didn't say that we were first-class boys—they took that for granted. We simply said that we were the committee that had been instructed to make new arrangements regarding the banquet. All the other things you spoke to me about have been attended to, and if you do your part as well as I have done mine, the dinner is ours as sure as you are a foot high. I send this by the baggage-master, as I promised.

“In great haste, yours,

“ENDICOTT.”

“He's a brick!” exclaimed Enoch, as he folded the letter and returned it to the envelope. “And, Brigham, you are another. No one but you would ever have thought of such a thing as this, and if I have any influence with the fellows, the toast of the evening shall be: ‘Lester Brigham—the student to whose fertile brain we are indebted for this evening's enjoyment.’ Endicott

shall give it, if no one objects. He's the best speaker among us, and he will do it up brown."

From this time forward the conspirators lived in a fever of excitement. There was but one thing to be feared now, and that was that Mr. Taylor or Mr. Colson might telegraph to the president of the first class, asking if the "committee" who had called that day had authority to make so radical a change in the programme ; but they need not have troubled themselves about that. The gentlemen referred to had been informed by the secretary that if the class thought best to make any changes, they would be duly notified of the fact by a committee and not by letter, and so they supposed that everything was just as it should be.

The morning of the eventful day came at last, and shortly after breakfast the boys exchanged their fatigue suits for their dress uniforms, and began to leave the grounds—all except the members of the first class, who, as we have recorded, marched out in a body in the afternoon, in time to take the five o'clock train. Now more strategy on the part of the conspirators became necessary in order to rid themselves of the presence of those

who were not in the secret. There were tickets to be purchased—Ross's pocket-book came handy now—and then they were to hold themselves in readiness to board the one o'clock train ; and, more than that, both of these maneuvers were to be accomplished secretly, or else, to quote from Jones, the fat would all be in the fire.

Among those who had come out with them, and who persisted in keeping them company in spite of all their efforts to shake them off, were several good little boys of the Bert Gordon stamp ; and these must be kept in profound ignorance of the contemplated movement. If they should happen to see any of Enoch's party at the window of the ticket office, or should chance to be on the platform when they boarded the cars, some tale-bearer among them would be sure to hasten to the academy with the information, which might open the eyes of the first-class boys and lead to an investigation by telegraph. Enoch knew that the majority of these good little boys could be trusted—that even if they should accidentally learn the details of all his plans they would not say a word to the teachers about it, unless they were questioned ; but there were two among them who

could not hold their tongues, and who must be got out of the way at all hazards.

"But how shall it be done? that's the question," said Enoch, who was at his wit's end now. He and Jones had been talking about it all the morning, and just as he asked the question Lester Brigham came up and joined in the conversation. For a wonder the latter hit upon an idea at once. He, too, had been revolving a knotty problem in his mind, and that was, how to get rid of Wallace Ross. He (Lester) was to be toasted as the originator of the grandest scheme for amusement that had ever been thought of by school-boys, and he was afraid that when his name was proposed, Ross would become indignant and tell the truth about the matter. That would be very mortifying indeed, and Lester had decided that the only way to prevent it was to keep Ross away from Borden-town. He had just thought of something.

"Leave them to me, fellows," said he. "I'll see that they are not around when we get on the cars."

"If you will," exclaimed Enoch, seizing Lester's hand and giving it a hearty shake, "you will add another to the long list of favors for which we are indebted to you. I wish I could think up things

as readily as you can, but my wit is slow. How are you going to do it?"

"I haven't yet fully decided," was Lester's reply. "But I will tell you how you can help me: I want you to spread it around where these two fellows can hear it, that the train we intend to take is an hour late; but——"

"Oh, that wouldn't do at all," said Enoch, hastily. "They'd get scattered all over town, and half of them——"

"But," repeated Lester, paying no attention to the interruption, "have it distinctly understood among our own boys that it is on time. Then come down to the livery stable at twelve o'clock, sharp, and, no matter what I am doing, tell me that the superintendent wants to see me at once. Understand?"

"I understand what you say," replied Enoch, "but I don't understand the plot."

"No matter; I understand it, and you will see how nicely it will work. Will you do as I say?"

Enoch replied that they would, and Lester hastened away to hunt up Wallace Ross before any of the crowd had time to post him in regard to the trick that was to be played upon Smith

and Wheeler, the two good little boys whom Enoch was afraid to trust. He found him after awhile, and lost not a moment in putting his hastily-formed plans into execution.

"I say, Ross," he exclaimed, with a great show of annoyance, "I have been looking all over for you. Our train is an hour behind time, and——"

"How do you know?" demanded Ross.

"Telegraph," answered Lester.

"Now that's very provoking," said Ross, who believed every word of it. "I wish we were in the city now, for I shall not draw an easy breath as long as we stay here. A word from the operator in Hamilton would make dough of our cake in a little less than no time."

"That's so," assented Lester. "I feel as uneasy as you do—more so, in fact, because—er——"

"Because what?" said Ross.

"No matter," replied Lester, with an air which said that he could tell something surprising if he wanted to. "But if the superintendent should send an orderly after me with instructions to report at the academy without a moment's delay, it would not astonish me in the least. But if he does, I don't mean that the orderly shall find me.

Let's go out to the Big Tree, get a good country dinner, and inquire about the trout-fishing."

The Big Tree was the name of a little tavern that was located in the country, about five miles beyond the village limits. It was a favorite place of resort for the students who were fond of angling, and a visit to the ponds and streams in its immediate vicinity was sure to result in a full creel. The landlord was famous for his pies, but when it came to pancakes, the boys all agreed that he could not begin to compete with Cony Ryan. The Big Tree was so far away that it was some trouble to reach it, and so the students were accustomed to go in parties large enough to fill a two-horse carriage, which they paid for by "pooling" their small supply of pocket-money.

"I am in favor of that," said Ross, readily. "The boys drew on me pretty heavily this morning, but I think I have enough left to pay my share toward a livery rig."

"I haven't," said Lester; "that is if you and I go alone. Let's get two more good fellows to go with us. It will make the expense lighter. Here come Smith and Wheeler. They've got some collaterals; let's ask them."

"What, those spooneys!" exclaimed Ross, who was very much surprised. "I believe I would rather stay here than go with them. I thought you didn't like them."

"Neither do I; but our fellows are pretty well strapped, and, as I said, Smith and Wheeler have money. We shall be in their company only about an hour and a half, and you surely can stand it for that length of time."

"We won't run any risk of missing the train, will we?"

"Oh, no. I have a watch."

Smith and Wheeler came up at this moment, and when Lester proposed that they four should club together and hire a team to take them out to the Big Tree, they consented at once. The four boys then strolled slowly toward the livery stable, which they reached shortly before noon. When Lester told the proprietor that he and his companions wanted a double team for an hour and a half, the man did not seem to be in any hurry to order it out.

"Have you got the money to pay for it?" he demanded.

"Of course we have," answered Lester, indig-

nantly. "Did I ever order a team of you without paying for it?"

"No, you never did; but last week some of your boys ordered a rig for Saturday afternoon, and told me to be sure and keep it for them, and they would take it, rain or shine. I could have let that team a dozen times. When Saturday came it rained, and the boys didn't show up; consequently I lost my money."

"We are perfectly willing to pay you in advance," said Ross.

"More than that," continued the livery-stable man, "I've had students come here, order a rig out of pure meanness, and slip out while I was hitching up; and I *have* said that no academy boy should ever draw a rein over one of my horses again. Will you take the team if I bring it out?"

"Of course we will," said Wheeler, who, being perfectly honest and upright in all his dealings, felt rather nettled by the livery-man's suspicions. "You must think we have little to do to come here and call for a thing we don't want."

The livery-man laughed and turned away, and presently one of his hands backed a neat wagon

with a canopy top into the middle of the floor, and another appeared leading the two horses that were to draw it. Then Lester knew that if Enoch and Jones did their part, the three objectionable boys were effectually disposed of. Enoch had not yet made his appearance, but Lester had so much confidence in him that his absence did not trouble him in the least. He climbed into the wagon and sat there while the horses were being hitched to it; then the others got in, and Wheeler, who handled the reins, was about to drive out of the barn, when the chief conspirator and his lieutenant suddenly appeared at the door.

CHAPTER X.

AN ALARM AND A STAMPEDE.

“HALLO!” exclaimed Enoch. “Where are you fellows going?”

“Out to the Big Tree to get dinner and to ask about the fishing,” replied Wheeler.

“Then you had better hurry up and get out of town as soon as you can,” observed Jones. “The orderly is looking for you, Mr. Brigham.”

“What orderly?” demanded Lester, who seemed very much surprised to hear it.

“Colonel’s orderly, of course.”

“What does he want of me?”

“He wants to tell you that the superintendent desires your immediate presence at the academy,” said Enoch, who played his part well, because he began to understand Lester’s trick. “You have been doing something, Brigham, and your day’s sport is up a hollow stump.”

“Did anybody ever hear of such luck?” cried Lester, with a great show of disappointment and anger. “Boys, I can’t go.”

“What did I tell you?” exclaimed the proprietor of the livery-stable, who thought he had been imposed upon again. “I knew you didn’t want that rig when you asked for it.”

“Oh, yes, we do, Mr. Watkins,” answered Wheeler, hastily. “The rest of us will go, and perhaps while we are driving through the village we can find some good fellow to take Lester’s place. We’re sorry for you, Brigham, and hope you haven’t been doing anything *very* bad. If you say so, we’ll take you up to the academy and wait for you at the gate. You may be able to explain matters so that you can get out again.”

“You had better go on and hunt up some other fellow,” said Enoch. “I don’t think you will see Brigham again to-day.”

Something that looked like a shade of anxiety settled on Lester’s face, and without saying another word he turned and hurried away, leaving his two friends to do the rest of the talking. Ross acted as though he didn’t know whether it

was best to go or not. Enoch and Jones were surprised to see him in the wagon, and wondered if they hadn't better give him a hint to get out; but after a little reflection, they wisely concluded that Ross would not have been there if Lester had not wanted to get rid of him for some reason of his own, and so they said nothing to him. They saw Wheeler drive out of the stable, and then walked slowly down the street in search of Lester, whom they found waiting for them around the nearest corner.

"How did you like my plan?" was Lester's first question.

"It worked splendidly—your plans always do," replied Enoch. "But did you want Ross to go too?"

"I did," answered Lester, emphatically. "To tell you the honest truth, I didn't want to trust him."

"I am sorry to hear that," observed Jones, "for he shelled out money with a lavish hand when we asked him for it. If it hadn't been for him, some of us would have been obliged to stay behind, for we could not have purchased tickets."

“Well, those who borrowed money from him can return it, can't they?” demanded Lester.

“Of course they can, and they will; but since Ross showed himself to be so open-hearted, I really wish he could have seen his share of the fun. However, if you think he couldn't be trusted, that settles the matter.”

“He'll be glad of it when the time for settlement comes,” Enoch remarked. “We'll stand by him then, and nobody will know that he was one of us.”

As the hands of the clock in the depot began moving slowly around toward one o'clock, a person standing on the platform could not have failed to notice the large number of boys in gray overcoats who crossed the railroad track and disappeared behind the long line of freight cars that stood opposite. When the lightning express came in, they boarded it without the least confusion or noise, and not one of the numerous hangers-on who were walking about the platform seemed to be the wiser for it. When Enoch came to go through the train after it had started on again, he found there was not a single face missing except that of Wallace Ross. The latter heard the

express whistle for the station, and a glance at his watch showed him that there was a big mistake somewhere. The train was on time ; but he was a mile or more outside the village limits, and he knew that he could not return in season to catch it, even if he could have induced his companions to make the attempt. He was very much disappointed. He was one of the coolest and most determined boys in Enoch's party, and he had made up his mind to have a good time, and to submit without a murmur to any punishment the court-martial might see fit to visit upon him ; but he never once suspected that he was the victim of misplaced confidence.

During the ride to the city the conspirators were very quiet. They could not shout and sing, as did the first-class boys, who came over the road a few hours later. The bravest of them were excited and nervous, and the timid ones heartily wished themselves back in Bridgeport ; but there was not a student among them who dared say so for fear of being denounced as a coward. When the train came to a stand-still in the depot, even Enoch began to show a little anxiety. There were more people there than they had expected to see,

and the Silver Cornet Band, which was out in full force, was sending forth the strains of greeting that ought to have been reserved for a different occasion, the tall form of the drum-major standing in front, beating time with his gold-headed staff, his bear-skin cap towering high above the heads of all the rest of the crowd.

“Endicott has done his work well, and we are in for it as sure as we are living, boys,” said Enoch, to a few of his right-hand men who were clustered about him. “I see he has secured possession of the colors, and they will go far toward allaying suspicion. Now, Jones, you draw the boys up in line, and I’ll come back and take command as soon as I can say a word to Endicott. I want to know just what he has done so that I won’t make any mistakes.”

The conspirators, having been thoroughly instructed, fell in without waiting for the word of command, Lester Brigham proudly taking up his position in the second lieutenant’s place in the line of file-closers. There were a good many veterans in the city, and Lester felt elated to think that when they saw him marching there they would take him for an officer.

When Enoch stepped off the train, Endicott and his three companions, who had done so much in so short a time to make the undertaking successful, came forward and saluted him with as much respect as they would have showed him if he had been a real commander instead of a bogus one.

"Captain," said Endicott, "I have the honor to report that I have secured the colors in accordance with my instructions. And," he added, in a lower tone, "I claim the privilege of carrying one of them, and Miller wants to carry the other."

"Very good, sir," replied Enoch, returning the salute. Then he, too, lowered his voice, as he asked, with some misgivings: "Where are Blake and his committee? Is everything all right?"

"Blake and the two fellows who came with him are probably out at Grove farm, wandering about in the woods and trying to find their way back to the city," was the reassuring reply. "Sam has brought back the report that that was where he left them. Everything is all right. Keep up a bold front and go ahead as though you were really

captain of the first class, and no one will suspect anything until Colonel Mack and the rest come in on the mail. You will find a special car over at the transfer-depot."

"Endicott, you are the best fellow for work of this sort I ever saw!" said Enoch, admiringly.

"I know it," was the modest reply. "But I don't believe in doing things by halves. After all, it was no trouble for me to get that car at reduced rates, for the men on the other road know who I am. Now you had better fall in and go ahead. It is almost train time."

After holding a short consultation with the leader of the band, Enoch went back to take command of the company, at whose head stood the two color-bearers; one holding aloft the Stars and Stripes, and the other carrying the white, gold-fringed flag of the academy. At the command, "Fours, right—march!" they wheeled into column, and moved off with as much steadiness and precision as a company of veterans. When they arrived at the transfer-depot they halted long enough to break ranks, after which they boarded the car that Endicott had been thoughtful enough to provide for them. It was the last one on the

train. It was to be dropped at Bordentown, and picked up again by the train that came through at four in the morning. When the boys were all in their seats, and the band had come in, Enoch and Endicott went out to see that the dinner was put into the express car. It was so very abundant, and the number of boys who went into the rear car was so small, that it is a wonder that Mr. Taylor did not suspect something. But he was kept busy superintending the removal of the eatables, and, besides, he probably thought that the students understood their own business better than he did ; and so long as he was well paid for his trouble, he did not think it worth while to bother his head about matters that were supposed to be under the charge of somebody else.

When the train moved out of the depot, the conspirators drew a long breath of relief, and began to act more like themselves. Looking upon their victory over the first-class boys as an assured thing, they broke out into cheers for Lester Brigham, whom they still believed to be the originator of the enterprise ; for Enoch Williams, who had managed everything so adroitly ; and for Endicott and his three companions, who had spirited Blake

and the rest of the committee of arrangements away into the country, so that they could have a clear field for their operations. The band helped the matter along by giving furious and discordant blasts upon their instruments, and the hubbub that arose in that car must have led the people living along the road to believe that there was a menagerie aboard.

“They’re shouting before they are out of the woods,” said the long-headed Enoch. “They seem to forget that there is such a thing as a telegraph in this part of the United States. Jones, when we reach the hall, you had better station a sentry at the foot of the stairs, with orders to allow no outsider to go by him. In that way we shall be able to intercept any little dispatches that the first-class boys may send to Mr. Taylor.”

“But won’t he be mad when he finds out how nicely he has been fooled?” exclaimed Lester, as if the thought had just occurred to him.

“I believe you,” assented Enoch. “He is a big man, and could make it very uncomfortable for us if he should set about it. That’s the reason I want that sentry placed in the hall. We must eat

the dinner, have our speeches, toasts and songs, and get back to Hamilton before he hears any bad news. If we don't, we shall find ourselves in hot water."

Lester and Jones had never thought of these things before, but now they began to see that the rightful owners of the dinner were not the only ones they had to fear. There were Mr. Taylor and his assistants, and there were the members of the band—twenty big, stout Germans, who would be likely to express their opinion of the afternoon's proceedings in a way that would be by no means agreeable. It was plain that the conspirators had placed themselves in a very unenviable situation, and that nothing but the exercise of the greatest caution could bring them safely out of it.

In due time the train reached Bordentown, and when it stopped in front of the depot, Enoch was greatly disgusted and not a little alarmed to discover that the only fire company of which the place could boast, had turned out to escort the visitors to the hotel in which the banquet was to be held. The little village had never before been honored by a class dinner, and the people intended to treat the boys so well that they would use their

influence to induce the next graduating class to hold their dinner there also. Enoch saw it all, but before he could express his sentiments regarding the action of the fire company, or ask advice of any of his counselors, the train came to a standstill, and the foreman, trumpet in hand, entered the car.

“Captain?” said he, looking around inquiringly; whereupon Lester and Jones pointed to Enoch.

“Captain, I am glad to meet you,” continued the foreman, “and in behalf of Deluge Number One, I have the honor to tender you the escort of the company through the principal streets of the village to the hotel.”

All the conspirators heard the foreman’s words, and their faces betrayed the utmost consternation. Enoch was the only one among them who kept his wits about him.

“Thank you, sir,” said he, returning the fireman’s salute. “You are very kind, and I am proud to accept your offer of escort. What do you want me to do?”

“You will please form on the right of my company, which is drawn up in line on the other side

of the depot. Let your band march in the centre. We have nothing better than a drum corps, but we can give you a noisy, if not a musical, welcome."

The foreman continued to talk in this way while the car was being side-tracked ; and he looked so jolly and good-natured, and seemed so anxious to do something to please the boys, that Jones's heart smote him.

"I declare, it is too bad to fool a man like that," said he, when he had a chance to say a word to Enoch in private. "I'll bet he's a splendid fellow."

"I know he is," was Enoch's reply. "But how are we going to keep from fooling him? We didn't ask him to come out here, and we can't very well request him to withdraw his company and leave us alone. It wouldn't be safe for us to tell him how the thing stands, for he's a stranger, and we don't know how far to trust him. He's here, and we've got to do as he says."

And they did, although there were many among them who wished that the foreman had been in Guinea or some other place before he came out to offer them the escort of his company. He did it

out of the goodness of his heart, of course, but all the same his unsolicited attentions were a nuisance as well as a source of uneasiness and alarm to the conspirators, who had hoped to go and come without attracting anybody's notice.

When their car had been pushed upon the sidetrack, and the train had cut loose from it and gone on, the conspirators disembarked at the word of command, and marching with soldier-like step and well-aligned ranks, moved down the street to take the position assigned them. Then the parade began. It didn't amount to much, of course, but the village people and the farmers and their families who had come miles in their big lumber wagons on purpose to witness it, evidently thought it something grand, for they thronged the streets on both sides and cheered the students loudly at every turn. After marching through the principal thoroughfares—and there were so few of them that it did not take them long to do that—the column was halted in front of the hotel, the band fell out and the firemen formed open ranks, facing inward. When the students, in obedience to Enoch's command, executed the movement "fours right" and then "right by twos," and passed through their

lines, the firemen saluted them by uncovering their heads, the boys replying in the same way. There was scarcely one among them who did not despise himself for receiving and returning honors which he was not entitled to receive or return, but there was no help for it.

The dining-room of the hotel had been engaged for the evening, and when the students had marched into it and broken ranks, Enoch took a hasty glance about him and then called his trusty counselors, Jones, Lester and Endicott, together for a consultation. The landlord had made a desperate attempt to decorate the room for the occasion, and had succeeded remarkably well, considering the very short notice he had received. The walls were covered with flags and wreaths of evergreen, and the long tables, which sparkled with glass and silverware, were adorned with a profusion of flowers.

“Now, here’s another pretty mess,” said Enoch to his counselors. “I don’t mind fooling such fellows as the first-class boys, who hold that we have no rights that they are bound to respect, but when it comes to taking in a jolly lot like these firemen, I weaken. They have done the very best

they could for us, and it would be nothing more than a civil thing on our part to ask them to help us eat the dinner."

"I don't see how we can get around it," observed Endicott, while the others shook their heads and looked very solemn. Their actions and the expression of their faces seemed to say that it was a bad business altogether, and they wished they were well out of it.

"Neither do I," said Enoch. "They will accept, of course, but none of our crowd will ever dare show their faces in Bordentown again."

"Why couldn't they have kept away and left us alone?" exclaimed Lester, pettishly.

"They could, but they didn't; they're here, and we've got to ask them to spend the evening with us. Let's do it at once and be done with it."

So saying, Enoch, accompanied by his three right-hand men, walked up to the foreman, and Endicott, who was a smooth-tongued fellow, formally invited him and his company to remain at the hotel as guests of the Bridgeport boys.

"We can promise you one of Mr. Taylor's best dinners, but not much of an entertainment—not near as elaborate as it was intended to be," said

Endicott. "The programme was changed at the very last minute, and this dinner will not be as grand as class dinners usually are. We have brought the music with us, and perhaps it is not too late to get up an impromptu dance this evening, if you——"

Endicott suddenly paused, for the scowl he saw on Enoch's face was dark and threatening. It told him in plain language that he was going altogether too far. The foreman did not see it, however, and he hastened to assure the boys that nothing would afford him greater pleasure; and as for the dance—why, that could be easily arranged. Country girls were always ready for such things, he said, and as they did not have as much fixing and fussing to go through with as city belles did, he and his men would undertake to fill the hall with them by eight o'clock that evening.

"Now you've done it," exclaimed Enoch, as the foreman hurried away to tell his men about the hop that was to come off after the dinner had been disposed of. "Endicott, of all the blunderheads I ever saw, you are the beat."

"Why, what's the matter?" demanded the latter, who couldn't see that he had done any-

thing out of the way. "We can't get any deeper into the mud than we are now, and we might as well have all the fun we can to-night, for it will be a long time before we shall have another chance. To-morrow we shall be called upon to settle with the fiddler."

"You've got us into a pretty pickle all the same," retorted Enoch. "It is bad enough to fool a lot of men; but when it comes to sailing under false colors before a party of girls—Endicott, you ought to have had better sense. If anything leaks out, those big, strapping firemen will make mince-meat of us."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Lester and Jones, in a breath; and even Endicott looked rather sober.

"But we mustn't let anything leak out," said he. "The boys have kept still tongues in their heads so far, and why should they begin to blab now, when we are in the very midst of danger?"

"There's just this much about it," said Enoch, without replying to Endicott's question. "I shall hold myself in readiness to dig out at the very first note of warning, and my advice to you and the rest of the fellows is to do the same.

The punishment the first-class boys will visit upon us, if they get the chance, won't be a patching to the pounding we shall get from these Yahoos if they discover that they and their girls have been duped. I didn't feel any great uneasiness before, but I tell you I shall be on the alert now."

There were some very badly frightened boys among the conspirators when Endicott's indiscretion became known, and Enoch thought they looked more like a lot of hunted criminals than anything else to which he could compare them. The majority of them could not bear to remain inactive in the dining-room, so they went out on the street, where they could have a fair chance to take to their heels should occasion seem to require it; but some of the sharpest of them, such fellows as Lester, Enoch and Jones, and their particular friends Barry, Dale and Morris, thought that headquarters, that is the dining-room, was the safest place for them. They knew that if any of the first-class boys sent a telegram to Mr. Taylor it would be brought straight to the hotel, and they wanted to make sure that he didn't get it. Colonel Mack, as we know, did send a dispatch to

Mr. Taylor, but it did not in any way interfere with the plans of the conspirators, because it came too late. The interruption to their little programme came from a different source altogether.

It happened about two hours after they reached Bordentown. The most of the students were strolling about the village to see what they could find that was worth looking at; the firemen had scattered in all directions to hunt up girls for the hop; and Enoch and the boys whose names we have mentioned above were walking up and down the dining-room, watching Mr. Taylor and his assistants, who were busily engaged in placing a tempting array of viands upon the tables, when suddenly the shrill scream of a locomotive whistle—a triumphant scream that had a volume of meaning in it—rent the air. An instant later the door was dashed violently open, and a pale and excited student, whose intense alarm seemed to have robbed him of all his senses, rushed in, shouting at the top of his voice:

“Oh, boys, there’s the very mischief to pay! Here come Blake and a whole crowd of fellows! Get out o’ this quick. They are talking with some of the firemen.”

This startling announcement was enough to frighten anybody. It even took away the last particle of Enoch's courage. He stood as motionless as if he had grown fast to the floor, while Mr. Taylor and his assistants paused with their hands full of dishes and looked at one another. Enoch was the first to recover himself and to think of escape. The burly form of the caterer was interposed between himself and the door, and as the boy did not dare attempt to pass him, he turned and made a dash for the nearest window, his example being followed by all his companions. This retrograde movement aroused Mr. Taylor, and at the same time opened his eyes to the fact that he had been very neatly taken in. Slamming down the dishes he held in his hands, he called out, in angry tones :

“Stop those boys! Catch the captain; he is at the bottom of it all.”

Mr. Taylor started forward to obey his own order; but he was slow as well as heavy, while Enoch was like a cat in his movements. As quick as a flash he threw up the window, and dropping lightly to the ground, made off at an astonishing rate of speed. He was out of sight in an instant.

CHAPTER XI.

A TREACHEROUS COACHMAN.

LET us now go back to Blake, the energetic chairman of the committee of arrangements, to whose careful management the boys in the first class had intrusted their affairs in Hamilton, and see where he was and what he had been doing all this while. The last time we saw him he and two companions, Forester and White, were standing in the lower hall at the academy, listening to some very emphatic instructions from Clark, the president of the class, after which they hurried out to take the early train for the city. They were going to look at the hall which the proprietor, Mr. Colson, had been requested to decorate in his best style, for the banquet that was to be held there that night, and to speak to Mr. Taylor about the dinner, for which he had been instructed to provide two hundred covers.

If the arrangements were satisfactory, they were to ease President Clark's mind by telegraphing the fact at once ; and if there were anything lacking, they were empowered to set it right without loss of time. These three boys were the only members of the class who had been to Hamilton thus far. Their companions had left everything to their judgment, and of course they felt their responsibility, and were anxious to make the dinner as grand as it was expected to be.

There was a goodly number of students on the train, members of other classes who were going to the city to spend the day with their parents, and this proved to be a very fortunate thing for Blake. Had it not been for the assistance which they willingly and eagerly rendered him, he and his committee would have gone back to Bridgeport without the courage to hold up their heads. They reached Hamilton without any mishap, and the first person Blake encountered, as he jumped off the cars, was a negro with a very shiny face, a roguish eye and a bald head, who came up holding his hat in his hand.

"Which one of you young gentlemen is Mr. Blake, if you please, sah?" was his greeting.

"I am," replied the owner of that name.

"Well, sah, if you please, sah," continued the negro, "I'se driving coach for Mr. Taylor at the present opporchunity, sah, and he done sont me down hyar this mawning to tol' you as how he was tuk sick at the residence of his paternal father out in the country las' night, and that he can't possibly officiate with his official services on the happiness of the present occasion of this evening; therefore, he requests, as a peculiar and macadamize favor to himself, that you will come out to the house of his paternal parents so that he can talk to you about the dinner, you know, sah. He done sont me with the coach to brung you."

The boys would have been greatly amused had it not been for the discouraging information which the coachman strove to impart by his grandiloquent verbiage. Mr. Taylor was ill, he could not "officiate" at the dinner that evening, and he had sent the negro to bring them out to his father's house in the country, so that he could tell them what to do in his absence.

"That's the worst piece of news I have heard in a long time," exclaimed Blake. "Everything

has gone well with us so far, and now the trouble begins. There's nobody who can manage that dinner like Mr. Taylor."

"That, sah, is a question beyond dispute," assented the negro.

"I suppose we had better go with him," said White. "If Mr. Taylor can't give us the benefit of his services, we want to know how to get on without him. How far is it, uncle?"

"Sam, sah," corrected the coachman. "That's my name. The distance of the journey is immaterial—about fo' miles. The horses are speedy, and will take you out there while you are talking about it. This way, sah; right this way. Hyar's the carriage."

The negro led the way through the depot to the sidewalk, where he had left his vehicle, an elegant barouche, in charge of a footman as black as himself. The boys got in without hesitation, the coachman and his companion mounted to their places on the box, and the swift horses whirled them away toward the country. The moment they were out of sight, four boys came out of the baggage-room in which they had been concealed, and one of them stepping up to the window of the

telegraph-office, wrote a dispatch addressed to Julius Clark, Bridgeport Military Academy. It ran as follows :

“Everything is just as it should be. There is no hitch anywhere. The hall looks beautiful, and the dinner is lovely. I hope the fellows will be satisfied with what we have done.”

Another boy, whose name was Baker, then came forward and affixed his initials, G. E. B., to the dispatch, and the operator sent it off.

“There, sir,” observed Endicott, as he and his three friends turned away from the window, “that telegram contains nothing but the truth. The hall really is magnificent—you know that was what we said when we saw it last night—and so is the dinner. Everything *is* just as it should be, *for us*, there has been nothing to interfere with our programme so far, and I certainly hope the fellows—our fellows—will be satisfied with what we have done. If, when Clark receives the dispatch, he chooses to think that the letters G. E. B. stand for George E. Blake instead of Gilbert E. Baker, he is welcome to do it. It won't be our fault, will it?”

Meanwhile Blake and his unsuspecting committee were being carried farther and farther into the country. When they began to think it was about time that the "fo' miles" were accomplished, the coachman informed them, in response to their inquiries, that they were only about half way to Mr. Taylor's house—that miles in the country were about twice as long as they were in the city, and with that explanation they were obliged to be content. At length the carriage was driven into a piece of thick woods, through which the road wound and twisted in the most bewildering fashion. The coachman told them that he was taking a short-cut by which he would save half an hour's driving over the very worst road in America; but on this point the boys were inclined to be skeptical.

"I should say that *this* was the very worst road in the known world," exclaimed Forester, as he and Blake clung to opposite sides of the seat to keep from being dashed against each other. "If Mr. Taylor doesn't give you a good overhauling for straining the springs of his carriage, I shall always think he ought to. Perhaps you had better let us get out and walk."

"Oh no, sah," protested the negro. "Mr. Taylor wouldn't like for me to drap you young gentlemen in the mud. We are most da' now, but I tell you befo' han' that I can't take you close to the residence by this road. I'll have to drap you at the foot of the hill, and let you walk across the pastur'."

The boys said they wouldn't mind that, but still they were somewhat surprised when the carriage came to a stand in the deepest and darkest part of the woods, and the coachman sprang down to open the door. On their right was a thick brush fence, inclosing a piece of barren and rocky pasture; and the coachman told them that when they reached the top of the hill they would see Mr. Taylor's house in the valley below them. It wasn't more than five minutes' walk, he said, and he would wait there until they came back.

It was the greatest wonder in the world that Blake and his companions did not begin to suspect something by this time, but they didn't. Their minds were so fully occupied with Mr. Taylor's illness, and with thoughts of their dinner, which they knew would not pass off half as

smoothly without him as it would with him, that they could not think of anything else. They thought it rather strange that Mr. Taylor's man should dump them in the woods when he had been ordered to bring them to the house, and they told one another so as they toiled up the steep hill in the pasture ; but still they did not dream of treachery until they reached the top and found that there was no house in sight. All they could see before them was a deep and thickly-wooded ravine, with another hill on the other side of it, as high and barren as the one on which they stood.

"Now, then, what does this mean?" said Blake.

"And where is the carriage?" chimed in For-ester.

Sure enough, where was it? Like the house of which they were in search, it was nowhere to be seen. It had been driven noiselessly away while their backs were turned. Even then the truth did not dawn upon them until after they had compared notes.

"Now, what does *that* mean?" exclaimed Blake. "That darkey never brought us out

here for nothing. There's something back of it, but what is it?"

"It hasn't got anything to do with our dinner, has it?" inquired White.

His companions looked blankly at each other, but made no reply. They hadn't thought of that.

"I am almost sure it has a good deal to do with it," continued White; "and we mustn't stand idling here while there may be bad work going on in the city. You remember what Lester Brigham did last term, don't you?"

The sound of that name seemed to put life into all the boys at once. With one accord they started on a keen run down the hill, scrambled through the fence at the imminent risk of ruining their fine uniforms, and began following up the tracks made by the carriage when it was driven away. For a time the trail was plain enough; but presently it ran into another road that had been badly cut up by heavy log-wagons, and there it was lost. They spent half an hour or more trying to find it, knowing that it would lead them out of the woods by the shortest route, and then gave it up in despair, and ran about in every direction

looking for the road that would lead them to the city ; but that, too, seemed to have disappeared as mysteriously as the carriage-tracks. Then they tried to retrace their steps to the fence, so that they could take a new start, but soon found that they couldn't even do that. Sam had done his work well, and Blake and his committee were as effectually lost as Endicott could have wished them to be. They talked the matter over while they were roaming about, and had finally arrived at the conclusion that Lester Brigham and some of his particular friends had sprung a trap on them ; but what the object of it was, they could not determine. The idea that he intended to run off with their dinner never once entered their heads.

“Blake, have you done anything during the term to make him angry at you ?” asked Forester, who was first corporal of his company. “Have you, White ? Well, I haven't either. I put him into an awkward squad once by the superintendent's orders, and gave him a pretty sharp drill in the manual of arms to teach him to mind what he was about when he was on dress parade ; but I didn't haze him.”

“No matter,” returned Blake. “He thought you did, and this is the result. He means to cheat us out of our dinner ; but if he succeeds, I’ll give him a dressing-down the first time I meet him that will do his heart good.”

The other boys made the mental resolution that they would do the same thing ; but before they could accomplish their object, it was necessary that they should get out of the woods. At one time it looked as though they might have to stay there for an indefinite period ; but fortunately they met a farmer who was on his way from the city. His wagon was empty, and if he had had a team of horses the weary students would have hired him to take them to Hamilton ; but he was driving a yoke of oxen, which he was obliged to pound continually in order to keep them moving, and the boys wisely concluded that they could cover the distance that lay between them and the city in much less time than the lazy cattle could. The farmer told them which way to go to find the main road—of course, they were walking straight away from it—and made them groan by telling them that Hamilton was eight miles distant—good long miles, too.

It took them three-quarters of an hour to find the road, and then they stopped to take a good look at themselves. Their uniforms were soiled, their boots covered with mud, their hands and faces scratched with briars, their overcoats stuck full of burrs, and taken altogether they looked very unlike the spruce young soldiers who had passed that way a few hours before.

"Never mind," said Blake, as he struck out at his best pace for the city. "We are going where there are plenty of barber-shops, and half an hour's work will set us right again."

"But we shall look like black sheep in the flock when we go to the dinner to-night," said White. "That ebony rascal took our grip-sacks away with him."

So he had ; and with them he had taken their epaulets, white belts and gloves, and polished brass buckles, which they had expected to put on before they went into the hall.

While on their way to the city, the students kept close watch of the road behind them, hoping that some one would come along and give them a lift ; but the teams were all going in the wrong direction, and it was not until they were within

two miles of their journey's end that they succeeded in getting a ride. They went at once to Mr. Taylor's restaurant, and found it almost deserted. There were only two or three waiters there, and it was with no little trepidation that Blake inquired for the proprietor.

"He's gone to Bordentown," replied the cashier, briskly; and the boys thought he looked a little surprised to see them in so dilapidated a condition.

"Then he isn't ill?" said Blake.

"Ill! No. He couldn't afford to be just now, on account of the dinner, you know. The understanding was that the festivities were to be held in Clarendon Hall, and we didn't know until the last moment that different arrangements had been made. The change in the programme was rather sudden, but our house was equal to it," said the cashier, with some pride in his tones. "We got the dinner to the transfer-depot in good shape, and it has gone to Bordentown; but why the cadets should want to go to that out-of-the-way place I can't imagine. Do you fellows belong to the graduating class? If you do, you are left."

“Do you know of any one living in the city who employs a colored coachman and footman?” inquired Blake, without replying to the cashier’s question. He had all a school-boy’s horror of being laughed at, and he dreaded the explosion of merriment, which he knew would follow if the man should learn what had happened to him and his companions. Their dinner had been spirited away, they saw that plainly enough, and it was too serious a matter to be laughed over. It could never be settled short of a fight.

“Oh, that reminds me of something,” exclaimed the cashier. “Mr. Endicott’s black coachman, Sam, has just been in here, and left these valises, which he requested me to hand to Mr. Blake if he should happen around.”

Blake and his friends did not care a snap of their fingers for their valises just then. The articles they contained would be of no use to them that night, and so they asked permission to leave them in the cashier’s charge for a few hours longer. Then they went out on the sidewalk and held a short council of war as they moved along.

“Did anybody ever hear of anything so exas-

perating?" exclaimed Forester, who was so angry that he could scarcely speak plainly. "Why didn't you ask him what sort of a looking fellow it was who came to him and told him that the class had decided to eat their dinner in Bordentown?"

"I had two reasons," answered Blake. "In the first place, I did not think it necessary to ask him any questions. I know who it was."

"So do I," said White. "It was one of Brigham's crowd—one of the fellows who helped him steal Mr. Packard's yacht last term."

"And in the next place," continued Blake, "I did not want to let him into our secret. There is no need that we should tell it to some one who will spread it all over town before we can have a chance to retrieve the day."

Blake's companions looked at him in great surprise. They had given the dinner up for lost, but it was plain that the chairman didn't consider that he and his class had been beaten yet.

"Do you mean to say that you are going to try to get it back?" demanded Forester.

"I mean that Lester Brigham and his crowd shan't eat that dinner, but our fellows shall," said Blake, quietly but firmly. "Don't ask me what

I am going to do, because I can't tell until I have seen Mr. Colson. We are all acquainted with him, and we know that he can be trusted. Let's go and ask him to tell us what happened here this morning, and then we shall know how to go to work to circumvent those pirates."

The boys had no trouble in finding Mr. Colson. He was sitting in his office at Clarendon Hall, and fortunately he was alone. He looked up in great astonishment when he saw Blake's face at the window.

"Hal-lo!" he cried. "What brought you back here?"

"It is a long story," answered the chairman. "Will you let us come in and talk to you for a few minutes?"

Mr. Colson at once got up and opened the door; and when Blake and his two friends walked into the office, and he saw what a condition their boots and uniforms were in, he knew that something had gone wrong with them. He had had some slight suspicion before, and now a light dawned upon him all at once, and he understood the matter as well as he did after it was explained to him.

"Blake," said he, as he locked the door and

pulled down the window-shutter, thus making sure of an uninterrupted interview, "you have lost your dinner."

"We are painfully aware of the fact, Mr. Colson," replied the chairman, with an attempt at pleasantry; "and we should be much obliged to you if you would tell us how it happened."

"All I know about it is this," replied the gentleman, and the members of the committee were greatly relieved to see that he showed not the slightest disposition to laugh at them. "You will remember that your secretary wrote to me, saying that the class was satisfied with what you three did the last time you were down here, and that if you thought it best to make any changes you would notify me by a committee, and not by letter. Well, last night a couple of young fellows came to me and said that they had been sent to say that the crowd wouldn't want my hall to-night—that for class reasons, which they were obliged to keep secret, they had decided to eat the dinner in Bordentown. They told Taylor the same thing about the dinner, and ordered him to pack it up and have it at the transfer-depot by the time the lightning-express came in."

“The impudent scoundrels !” exclaimed White, while Forester brought his clenched fist down into his open palm with a report like that of a pistol.

“If they were not authorized to act for your class they were pretty cheeky, that’s a fact,” assented Mr. Colson.

“They were authorized to act for nobody,” said Forester, hotly. “They’re a lot of robbers. They bamboozled you and Mr. Taylor completely.”

“I know they did ; but you can readily see that Taylor and I are in no way to blame for that. We are not acquainted with more than a dozen boys in your class, and although we thought it rather strange that you should suddenly make up your minds to go to so lonely a place as Borden-town to eat your dinner, we asked no questions, because we did not want it to appear that we were trying to pry into school-boy secrets.”

“Excuse me a moment,” said Blake. “Was Endicott one of the boys who waited on you and told you we should not want the hall ?”

“Endicott ! No. Is he mixed up in it ?”

Blake replied that he was, and with another slight apology for the interruption went on to tell

how Sam had met them at the depot that morning, carried them out into the country to consult with Mr. Taylor, who was so ill that he could not appear at the hall that evening, and left them in the woods, eight miles from the city. It was while they were trying to find their way out that they got their boots muddy and their coats covered with burrs.

As Mr. Colson listened, the muscles of his face gradually relaxed, and when Blake wound up the story of his adventures, he threw back his head, pounded his knees with his clenched hands and laughed so loudly and heartily that the boys were obliged to laugh, too, angry as they were.

“No, I didn’t see Endicott,” said Mr. Colson, as soon as he could speak. “If I had, I should have suspected something at once; for I know him, and I happen to know, too, that he doesn’t graduate this year. He was sharp enough to keep out of my sight, and to send two boys I never saw before. Those same boys came around this morning and got the flags, which I had fastened up over the musicians’ stand, and when that crowd of ‘pirates,’ as you call them, came in on the lightning-express, they marched through the

streets, with the band playing and colors flying——”

“Has the band gone to Bordentown, too?” cried Forester.

“Certainly. Everything was done up as slick as you please. Just before they left the city, their advance guard, or whatever you call those fellows who did the business for them, dropped about a bushel of notes into the post-office, all addressed to your guests, no doubt, stating that the time and place for holding the banquet had been changed.”

“Whoop!” yelled Forester, who being utterly unable to sit still and listen to this cold-blooded description of the way in which his class had been outwitted, jumped to his feet and stamped about the office, shaking his fists in the air, and acting altogether as if he had suddenly taken leave of his senses.

“Now the best thing you can do,” continued Mr. Colson, “is to telegraph your boys to stay in Bridgeport. They will only make themselves a laughing-stock if they come here.”

“I wouldn’t do that for any money,” exclaimed Blake, earnestly.

“What good will it do them to come here?” inquired Mr. Colson. “The dinner is gone—there is no two ways about that.”

“That remains to be seen,” answered Blake. “They’ve got a pretty sharp fellow at their head——”

“I should say so,” exclaimed Mr. Colson. “Who is he, anyhow? I am sorry he stole your dinner, but I must say I admire the skill he showed in doing it.”

“The idea originated with Lester Brigham, a Mississippi boy,” replied Blake. “He is the same fellow who got up the scheme for running off with Mr. Packard’s schooner last term. But Enoch Williams managed that expedition, and I am of the opinion that he is furnishing the brains for this one. Now let’s talk business. Do you suppose I could charter a locomotive and two cars at the transfer-depot?”

“What do you want to do with them?”

“I am going after that dinner. There were a score or more of academy boys visiting here in town when those pirates marched through the streets with our band and our flags, and I don’t see why they didn’t do something about it.”

“What in the world could they have done?” asked White. “They could not have stopped them even if they had wanted to, and they had no excuse for calling upon the officers of the law for help. Besides, how do you know but that every one of the twenty boys who are visiting here are not in sympathy with them? Endicott and two other boys that we know of have gone to Borden-town with Lester and his crowd, and what reason have we to think that they are the only Hamilton boys who are in the plot?”

Blake began to look sober now. These words opened his eyes to the fact that he had set himself no easy task when he resolved to capture that dinner. Still the attempt must be made—that much was settled—and if it failed, what could the class say to the guests who had come so far, in response to their invitation? This question made him so nervous and excited that he could scarcely keep his seat.

CHAPTER XII.

“FALL IN FOR DINNER!”

“**W**HAT will the superintendent do with those boys for stealing your dinner?” asked Mr. Colson, after a little pause.

“Nothing much,” replied Forester, in a tone of disgust. “They will simply be court-martialed for stretching their passes, and that will be the last of it. They have broken no law, and consequently they can’t be touched for taking our dinner. If there is a sergeant or corporal among them—a shoulder-strap wouldn’t have anything to do with such a crowd—he will be hauled over the coals for conduct unbecoming a gentleman and an officer; but they can’t punish him beyond taking some of his credit-marks away from him. But what were you going to say about that locomotive, Blake?”

“I propose, in the first place, that we hire a

carriage apiece, and ride around the city and see how many of our boys we can get together ; and if we can raise force enough to warrant it, we will charter a couple of cars and go down to Bordentown after our dinner."

"And you will get it, too," said Mr. Colson, who could not have taken more interest in the matter if he had been a boy himself. "I will help you all I can, and as I am well acquainted with the president of the Bordentown Branch, perhaps my influence will be of some use to you. I am glad I did not strip the hall. Something told me that I had better let it alone for a day or two."

The boys lingered in the office long enough to make a little improvement in their personal appearance, which they accomplished by a liberal use of Mr. Colson's blacking, and by picking the burrs off their coats. Then they hastened to the nearest livery stable to secure carriages and drivers, while Mr. Colson bent his steps toward the transfer depot, where he found an engine but no passenger cars. There were flats in abundance, however, and the superintendent said the boys might have a couple of them for nothing if

they would bring the dinner back with them. In that case he would charge them for the use of the engine only; but if the “pirates” beat them off and held fast to the dinner (both he and Mr. Colson seemed to think that there would surely be the biggest kind of a fight in Bordentown), he would make no deduction whatever.

The president was a dignified old gentleman, but he had not forgotten that he was a boy once, and he even said that he wished he could see his way clearly toward offering assistance to the rightful owners of the dinner; but when he saw the company of students which Blake and his two companions, with such help as their drivers had been able to render them, had brought together in an incredibly short space of time, he knew it wasn't necessary. There were eighteen of them—all mischievous, fun-loving boys, who were ripe for a frolic of any kind, so long as they had the law on their side. They were all overwhelmed with amazement at the skill and secrecy with which Lester and his party had carried out their designs, and at the exceeding coolness and impudence they had exhibited in marching through the streets of Hamilton to the music of a band that

had been engaged by somebody else, and for an altogether different purpose. A few of them were as angry as they would have been if the trick had been played upon the members of their own class ; but the majority looked upon it as a huge joke, and laughed heartily over it to the intense disgust of Corporal Forester, who was sorely tempted to fight some of them. But they never hesitated a moment when Blake told them that he wanted their assistance. They went with him willingly, and if a fight had been forced upon them, they would have struggled as desperately for the possession of the dinner, as the first-class boys themselves. They had all heard the music of the band in the morning, but did not take the trouble to inquire the reason for it ; consequently they knew nothing of the trick that had been played upon the graduating class until Blake and his committee waited upon them at their homes and told them of it. They fully concurred in Blake's opinion—that although Lester Brigham was at the bottom of it, Enoch Williams was furnishing the brains.

Their train being in readiness, the students sprang aboard the cars, and Blake waved his

hand to the engineer as the signal to go ahead. The latter had been told that haste was not only desirable but necessary, and he "opened wide out" almost at the start. The boys had never ridden on flat cars before, and they were not long in finding out that it was a most disagreeable mode of traveling. The road was rough, the cars swayed from side to side in the most alarming manner, and as there was nothing to which they could hold fast, they were in imminent danger of being thrown off; but they gave no heed to that. They clung to one another for mutual support, and shouted and sang at the top of their voices—all, except Blake and his committee, who were in no humor for nonsense. They couldn't forget how much they had at stake.

The twenty-four miles that lay between Hamilton and Bordentown were accomplished in almost as many minutes, and when they reached a point from which they could take a survey of the principal street, they were not a little chagrined to see that there were a good many men wearing red shirts and firemen's hats, strolling about in company with fellows in gray overcoats, and fatigue caps of the same color. This made it

evident that Lester and his followers had been tendered a reception on their arrival at the village.

"We'll give them another," exclaimed Forester, "and it will be one they will remember as long as they live."

"You will have to catch them first," observed a tall student, who stood behind Blake, and who, like a good many of the others, had put himself in fighting trim by pulling off his overcoat. "Just see them run, will you!"

Blake and his committee were surprised as well as amused at the magical manner in which the gray-coats disappeared when the wearers caught sight of their train. They scattered in every direction, and the engineer, appreciating the situation, gave a loud blast on his whistle to taunt them with their cowardice. The firemen and the members of the band, believing that the newcomers were first-class boys who had accidentally missed the regular train, came out on the platform to meet them, the tall band-master and his big bearskin cap leading the way. The chairman of the committee was the only student in the party with whom he was ac-

quainted, and him he greeted with great effusion.

"Vel, Meester Plake," said he, in the pompous tone which a conceited and well-to-do German knows how to use better than anybody else, "I peen glad to see you. I did think you would be too late for the tinner."

"Mr. Bambreen," replied Blake, "you and your men have been imposed upon. Did your company give escort to the students who came in a little while ago?" he added, turning to one of the firemen.

"We did," answered the latter. "We heard they were coming, and thought it would be polite to show them a little respect."

"You were very kind, I am sure, but the trouble is, you showed respect to the wrong fellows. They are frauds, the whole of them. They have no right to that dinner. It's ours, and we have come after it."

"And won't there be any dance to-night?" exclaimed the fireman. He didn't quite understand what Blake said about the dinner, but he saw that he and his company had been duped in some way, and he was all ready to get mad about it.

“There will be no dance here,” answered the chairman, “but there will be one in Hamilton. We are going right back, and as this band belongs to us, we shall take it with us.”

“And did those soldiers invite us to the table, and tell us to go out and get our girls, knowing all the while that they had no right to do it?” demanded the fireman.

Blake and his friends were greatly amazed. They had never dreamed that the conspirators would have the hardihood to do anything like this. Blake began to tremble for their safety. The fireman was indignant, so were his companions, a dozen of whom had gathered around, and the band-master was angry clear to the top of his bearskin cap, which seemed to bristle all over with rage. He wanted to say something, and as he could not do the subject justice in English, he broke out into a volley of German ejaculations that could have been heard a block away. He addressed his remarks to his men, who replied in the same language, and Blake understood just enough of what they said to satisfy him that instead of forcing a fight upon the conspirators, as Forester had time and again urged him to do,

it would be his duty to protect them from violence.

"Where are those cadets now?" he asked of the fireman.

"Over at the hotel, fixing up the dining-room," was the reply. "Boys," he added, turning to the red-shirted fellows who stood behind him, "let's go over there and pitch the last one of them through the windows."

With one accord the crowd, which by this time numbered full sixty men and boys, started through the depot and crossed the street in the direction of the hotel. A wink and a nod from Blake were enough to tell his companions what he desired them to do. By fast walking they gradually drew ahead of the crowd, and reaching the hotel first, they rushed into the doorway and purposely stuck fast there, blocking it up so effectually that the angry firemen and musicians behind them could not get in. Blake kept on to the door of the dining-room, and there he found Mr. Taylor and his assistants, who were just closing the windows, after making a vain effort to capture Enoch Williams and those of his party who were in the room when the whistle sounded. Fortunately the

boys had been too quick to be caught. They were now safe out of harm's way, and Blake was glad of it. So was Mr. Taylor, when he saw the flushed faces and angry scowls of the men, who finally succeeded in forcing their way into the room.

"I know who you three fellows are," said Mr. Taylor, nodding to Blake and his committee. "You are the boys who ordered the dinner. You need not waste time in explaining the situation, for I understand it perfectly. I wondered why I did not see you among the students ; but I thought it very likely that you had been breaking some of the rules and been kept in."

"The members of the first class are never gated on occasions like this," said Forester.

"Well, I didn't know that," replied Mr. Taylor. "The whole thing was done so openly and above-board, that any living man would have been fooled. I wonder if Colson was taken in."

"Yes, he was," answered Blake ; and he thought Mr. Taylor looked as though he was glad to hear it. "Boys, some of you take our colors down from the wall, and the rest pitch in and help pack up the dinner. Forester, you and I will hunt up

the landlord, and ask him what his bill is. Lester and his friends will find themselves short of pocket-money during the rest of the term, for the court-martial will compel them to pay roundly for all the trouble they have occasioned.”

“ Then they’ll pay me a good sum, I tell you,” said Mr. Taylor. “ They have put me to a heap of bother, and the dinner won’t look half as nice after a forty-eight mile ride over a rough railroad as it would if I could have taken it from my restaurant directly to the hall.”

Blake and Forester found that the landlord was inclined to be as angry as the firemen and musicians were. He didn’t like to have anybody make a fool of his house, he said, and he had a good notion to have ’em all took up.

“ That young Endicott has been guilty of a misdemeanor ! ” he almost shouted. “ He came here last night and engaged my dining-room for this evening, and now he has run away without paying his bill. That’s agin the law. The others were knowing to it, and for two cents I’d have the last one of ’em arrested.”

It was not without considerable difficulty that Blake succeeded in pacifying him ; but with all

his urging, he could not induce him to deduct one cent from the enormous bill he made out to be handed to the superintendent of the academy. He wanted full pay for the dining-room, just as much, in fact, as if it had been used all night, as he thought it was going to be, and nothing short of that would satisfy him. It was equally hard to quiet the musicians and some of the firemen, whose rage, when they discovered that the conspirators had slipped through their fingers like so many eels, was almost unbounded. Even the jolly, good-natured foreman, who had been home to tell his wife and daughter to get ready for a grand time during the evening, declared with some earnestness that he didn't approve of the way he had been treated. His men would be laughed at and "guyed" for months to come, because they had turned out to do honor to those who were not entitled to receive it; and what should the young fellows in the company say to the girls they had engaged for the dance? It was a mean trick, that was the long and short of it; and if that bogus captain knew when he was well off, he would steer clear of Bordentown in future.

At the end of half an hour the dinner had been carefully repacked and placed aboard one of the flats, the boys and the band crowded upon the other, and the engineer “opened out” for a rapid homeward run, Blake and his committee riding in the cab. They were so delighted over their success that they could scarcely restrain themselves. They had gone to work without any threats or bluster, but they had saved their class from disgrace, the dinner would go off just as they had planned it, and their guests need not know what a time they had had with it.

“Look here, fellows,” said Blake, when the train was fairly under way, “I am going to suggest to the class that these eighteen friends of ours, who were so prompt to respond to our appeals for help, be invited to fall in and spend the evening with us at Clarendon Hall; what do you say?”

“I say it would be nothing more than right,” replied Forester. “It is true, we did not need their services, but we thought we were going to when we started, and the class will be so glad to get the dinner back, and they will agree to anything we may propose”

“They’re in Hamilton by this time,” said White, glancing at his watch. “I’d like to have seen their faces when they first discovered that the band was not there to welcome them. Pipe up, Meester Bambreen,” he shouted across the tender to the band-master. “Give us something lively and triumphant—something appropriate to the occasion, you understand?”

The train was now within sight of the depot, and Colonel Mack and President Clark were watching it, as we have recorded. The band struck up “something appropriate,” the colors were given to the breeze, and in this way the good news which the committee was so impatient to communicate, was conveyed to their friends far in advance of them. They were rather surprised at the ovation they received when their train moved into the depot, but they could not linger to ask questions about it. Time was too precious for that.

“Can’t stop to do it now—story’s too long,” said Blake, in answer to Colonel Mack’s demand for an explanation. “But this much I can say to you: We’ve not a single instant to lose; but if we work fast and don’t get in one another’s way,

we can make the dinner go off as if nothing had happened.”

As the omnibus and express wagon were driven off with the band, he drew Mack and Clark off on one side, and said, waving his hand toward the students, who were assisting Mr. Taylor in removing the dinner from the flat car :

“You see those fellows? There are eighteen of them, they went with us fully expecting to join us in a fight with Lester and his crowd, and I say that the class ought to do something to show them that their kindness is appreciated. Colonel, suppose you march them down to the depot and bring them up to the hall with the company.”

“I’ll do it,” said Mack, promptly. “It will be a big innovation, but I don’t see how the boys can object to it under the circumstances. Here, you fellows ; fall in ! Don’t stop to ask any questions, but fall in. Forward, march !”

The boys obeyed, lost in wonder, and Colonel Mack marched them at quick time toward the depot. They found the company gathered about the band-master, who was haranguing them in his broken English, emphasizing his remarks by

flourishing his staff so furiously that it fairly whistled as it cut the air. He was telling how neatly Meester Plake had turned the tables on the conspirators, and trying to make the students understand how mad he was because he did not get a chance to take dot Veelliams by the collar for just one little minute. In the midst of it all, Mack marched in with his squad, who were greeted with cheers long and loud. The members of the company gathered about them, shaking their hands and patting their heads, and, when Captain Walker told them to fall in with the rest, there was not so much as a dissenting look seen.

The boys had by this time become aware that the events of the day were pretty well known in the city, but they were not prepared for the greeting that was extended to them all along their line of march from the depot to Clarendon Hall. It was almost as enthusiastic as the welcome Mack and his men received in Bridgeport after their battle with the mob at Hamilton Creek. They were loudly cheered, and now and then some one would run out into the street with a bouquet in his hand and make hurried inquiries for Blake, who had remained behind to assist Mr. Taylor ;

but he had plenty of friends who were willing to act as his representatives, and by the time they reached the reception room adjoining the hall, they were almost loaded down with flowers.

All the exciting incidents connected with this particular class-dinner were over at last, and it only remains for us to say nothing happened during the evening to mar their enjoyment, and that when they took the early train for Bridgeport, the students felt that they had done themselves credit. Blake was the hero, as he deserved to be, and he and his committee, as well as the boys who had gone down to Bordentown with them, were "toasted," the tall student who had been so prompt to put himself in fighting trim, responding in a speech that set the tables in a roar. Everybody wondered what had become of Lester and his party, and how they were going to get back to the academy; but still they did not feel alarmed for their safety, for if they exhibited the same skill in eluding the firemen that they did in getting away with the dinner, they were sure to come off scot free. And they did, every one of them, although a few had some very narrow escapes. They succeeded in boarding a freight

train which stopped at a water-tank about two miles above Bordentown, and arrived at Hamilton in time to take the two o'clock train for Bridgeport. When the first-class boys got there, they were all in their rooms under arrest, but sleeping soundly after the fatigue and excitement of the day. Their exploit was a nine days' wonder, and there were those who were sorry that they did not eat the dinner after they had put themselves to so much trouble to get it. Lester Brigham got into a quarrel with Wallace Ross the minute he entered his room. Ross accused him of treachery, and threatened to go before the court-martial and tell all he knew.

"Go ahead, if you think you can make anything by it," said Lester, as he tumbled into bed. "But if you know when you are well off, you will keep a still tongue in your head. No one outside the crowd knows that you had anything to do with it, and they never will know it either, unless you choose to tell it. But I *did* hear that the train was behind time. If you don't believe it, ask Enoch."

The court-martial did just what Forester said it would do. The judge-advocate could not make

the law cover the case, and all he could do was to prosecute the conspirators for stretching their passes—that is, for going to Hamilton and Bordentown when they ought not to have gone any farther than the village. Lester and Enoch received the heaviest sentences, losing all their credit marks and being gated for sixty days; but they did not seem to mind it very much, for were they not looked up to as the originator and manager of two of the most daring conspiracies that had ever been concocted within the walls of that academy? It had the effect of putting the students on the alert, and from that time forward it would have been impossible for anybody to interfere with a class dinner.

After the court-martial adjourned nothing happened to relieve the monotony of the academy routine. The first-class boys felt so very bitter against Lester and Enoch that they would not speak to them except when they were on duty and could not help it (they knew that they gave the former more credit than he deserved), but they were much too honorable to take revenge upon them, as they could have done had they been so disposed. On the contrary, Colonel Mack, for

fear of being considered vindictive, more than once overlooked offenses which he ought to have reported, and the teachers knew it and took him sharply to task for his neglect. This won him the good will of all except the very meanest of Lester's followers, who would have reported him in a moment if they had had the chance to do it.

That was a long term to some of the students, but the end came in due time, the encampment was over, the visitors had gone to their homes, and the much-dreaded examination was a thing of the past. The result was what everybody thought it would be, so far as two boys were concerned. When Colonel Mack took off his shoulder-straps Don Gordon put them on, and Bert was promoted to a captaincy. Enoch, Lester, and Jones did not get even a corporal's *chevrons*, and although they could blame no one but themselves for it, they had a good deal to say about favoritism, and Lester hated Don Gordon more cordially than ever.

"I don't suppose that he and Bert will speak to anybody now who is lower in the social scale than a Congressman," said Lester, in a tone of contempt. "I wish I could think up some way to get those straps off their shoulders."

“Well, you can’t,” replied Enoch. “Don is so far above you in rank that you can’t hurt him; but we can see to it that he and Bert don’t get any sport while they are down on the Chesapeake, and we will, too. We can do just as much damage as we please, and it will all be laid to the big-gunners, who don’t like Egan any better than I do. He informed on some of them, and got them into trouble with the detectives. I am well acquainted with two or three of those poachers, and I wouldn’t have them get down on me for any money.”

Don and Bert had looked forward to this vacation with many anticipations of pleasure. They had never seen salt water, and everything in Maryland would possess for them the same charm of novelty as the sights they saw in Maine and the sports they enjoyed while they were visiting there. In order that they might see all the pleasure there was in shooting canvas-backs, General Gordon, who was greatly pleased with the progress they had made during the term, had presented each of the boys with a breech-loading duck-gun, full choked, and warranted to kill at seventy-five yards. All the students who knew anything about guns, said they were beauties, and although Bert

looked rather small for so heavy a weapon, his gymnastic training enabled him to handle it with all ease.

The examination over and the result announced, Egan, Hopkins, Curtis and all the other boys who had taken the finishing course, bade a long farewell to their alma mater. Never again would they enter its hallowed precincts as pupils. Their career as students was over, and they were about to go out into the world to begin the battle of life. There were few dry eyes among them when the parting time came, and there was not one of them who did not wish, with his whole soul, that he had worked harder to make his record such as he knew the superintendent would have desired it to be. The latter, although a strict disciplinarian, was a big-hearted man, who took the deepest interest in the welfare of all his pupils, and the words of advice he uttered as he shook their hands for the last time, were full of wisdom.

The first southward bound train that left Bridgeport took our five friends with it. Their destination was Hillsboro', a little town in Garrett county, in the extreme western end of Maryland, next to West Virginia. It was here that Hopkins

lived, in a country famed for its game, and for the number and fighting qualities of its trout. Curtis had an idea that trout did not amount to much outside of Maine; but after he had broken his fine lance-wood rod in a battle with a Black-water fish, he was obliged to acknowledge his error.

The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad took them to Hillsboro' without any mishap, and there they passed a portion of their vacation in the most agreeable manner. Mr. Hopkins was a fat, jolly old gentleman, a thorough-going fox-hunter in spite of his years, and when the boys had seen him ride to the hounds, and noted the ease with which he took all the fences and brush-heaps that came in his way, they ceased to wonder where their fat crony got his skill in horsemanship. He would have been glad to keep the visitors there forever, for he took a great liking to them; but their time was short, their friend Egan had a claim upon them, and after a few weeks of good, solid enjoyment, which they fully appreciated, coming as it did on the heels of a long siege of study and drill, they bade the old fox-hunter good-by, and set out for the Eastern Shore.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BIG-GUNNER'S CABIN.

WE have told in the first chapter that Egan's guests were most cordially received by his father and mother ; that during the very first night they spent at his home they heard the report of one of the big guns which used to make such havoc among the water-fowl ; that the next morning they found the owner of it in a sink-boat on the bay, and that he threatened to do something to Egan if the boy frightened away any more ducks for him. We have also described how Egan and his visitors, after trying in vain to "toll" a flock of canvas-backs within range of their double-barrels by the aid of old Eph's yellow dog Bogus, accidentally stumbled upon one of the big guns which was hidden in the grass on the shore of Powell's Island. Enoch, Lester and Jones, who were sailing about in the Firefly, and

who had set themselves the task of watching the movements of Egan and his party, saw them when they raised the gun from its place of concealment, and they were present, too, when the police-boat came up and took possession of it. They went back and told the man in the sink-boat what had happened, and after hearing him swear, and extorting from him a sort of half promise that they should be permitted to accompany him the next time he made a night raid upon a flock of ducks, they kept on to Enoch's home. They roamed about the fields with their guns in their hands until a furious storm arose and drove them into the house; and when darkness came to conceal their movements, they were ready to carry into effect the resolution they had long ago formed—that Egan and his guests should not see any sport on the bay if they could help it. They decided that the first thing on the programme should be to deprive him of his yacht, a beautiful little craft which held a high place in Egan's estimation, and this they hoped to accomplish with the aid of the elements. They would turn her adrift, and let the wind and the waves make a wreck of her. They succeeded in boarding the yacht, but the

negro guard who slept on Mr. Egan's oyster-boat, which was anchored close by, was on the alert, and the roar of his old musket, the savage yelps and growls of his canine companions, and the whistle of the bullet which he sent altogether too close to Enoch's head for comfort, were enough to frighten them out of a year's growth. Enoch, who was in the act of slipping the chain when this unexpected interruption occurred, tumbled into the boat that lay alongside the cutter, caught up an oar, and he and his two friends pulled away for dear life. When the little vessel had been left out of sight in the darkness, he drew in his oar, took off his hat and wiped the big drops of perspiration from his forehead.

"By gracious!" panted Enoch. "That was a narrow escape, I tell you. I never dreamed that Egan kept a guard on his boats. He doesn't mean to let the big-gunners steal a march on him, does he? I must post Barr so that he will look out for himself."

"Who was the guard?" asked Lester, who was almost as frightened now as he was on the night the bugle sounded the false alarm.

"Oh, he was one of Egan's niggers," replied Enoch.

"Do you think he recognized us?"

"Of course not. It is too dark to recognize anybody at that distance. If he knew who it was that tried to slip that chain, the country about here would be made too hot to hold us. Hark! Didn't you hear something?"

The boys listened intently, and a few seconds later the stentorian tones of Gus Egan's voice were plainly audible above the roaring of the wind and the swashing of the white-caps. He was calling out the name of his father's oyster-boat.

"On board the Rob Roy!" he shouted.

"Yi, yi, sah!" replied the ebony guard.

"What were you shooting at?" demanded Egan.

"Dunno who his name was, but spect he was one of dem big-gunners who cussed so to-day kase you uns skeered away his ducks," answered the negro. "Didn't hit him, kase I heard him when he jump into his boat. You go to bed, Marse Gus, an' ole Sam look out for the boats; yes, sah, he will so."

A few more words passed between the guard and the owner of the yacht, but the shrieking of the wind prevented Enoch and his companions from hearing what they were. When they saw the lantern which Egan carried in his hand moving along the shore toward the house, they gave way on their oars again, and half an hour later found them snug in bed. They were much disappointed by their failure to set the yacht adrift, and Enoch loudly condemned the ill luck which seemed to follow him wherever he went, and the good luck that always attended Gus Egan's footsteps.

"Yes, they will have a good time in spite of us, and we shall be obliged to stand by and see them enjoy it," chimed in Jones, who would have given almost anything he possessed if he had been invited to make one of Egan's party.

"As far as I am individually concerned, it makes no sort of difference to me whether Egan enjoys himself or not," observed Lester. "He never did anything to me, and I should have nothing against him if he were not so stuck up; but I am now and forever opposed to that Don Gordon, who ought to be abolished. I'd give a thousand

dollars if somebody would carry him off and never bring him back again."

. The way Lester said this made Enoch and Jones laugh until their sides ached ; but they had occasion to recall his words before many hours more had passed away, and then they did not see anything so very amusing in them. Lester afterward uttered these sentiments in the hearing of one who took him at his word, and acted accordingly.

Enoch and his guests slept as soundly as though they had never in all their lives been guilty of any thing mean, and when the sun got up he found them sailing down the bay in the Firefly. After an hour's run they dropped anchor in the mouth of a little creek, alongside a sloop which had a small, lead-colored skiff on her deck, and a box-boat moored to the stern. On the shore stood a very dilapidated cabin built of unpainted boards, and in front of the open door sat Barr, the big-gunner, who was engaged in cleaning his double-barrel. The tone of voice in which he responded to Enoch's hearty "good-morning" was no doubt intended to be polite, but his "how dy!" sounded more like a growl than like words of greeting ;

but when he saw the schooner drop her anchor overboard he got into his canoe and came off to take the boys ashore. He did not seem disposed to turn the cold shoulder to his visitors, as men who make their living in unlawful ways are generally supposed to do, but that he was angry over the loss he had sustained the day before was plain to be seen. He and Enoch were old acquaintances and friends, and he was indebted to the boy for the warning that had enabled him to hold fast to his big gun as long as he did.

“Well, Mr. Barr, what sort of luck did you have yesterday with the canvas-backs and red-heads?” asked Enoch, as he sprang down into the canoe.

“None at all, dog-gone it,” growled the man in reply. “After Egan scared away them ducks, there wasn’t nary other flock come nigh me; and after you-uns told me that the police had gobbled my gun, I jest picked up my decoys and come home. But I will make up for it to-night, I bet you.”

“Are you going out?” exclaimed Enoch, eagerly.

“I am. There’s a big bed of ducks up at Bush River, and the wind is from the right quarter to

keep them there till to-morrow, any way. If some fool or 'nother don't come along and bang into 'em, I'll have a few dozen of 'em in Baltimore by morning. I've been powerful oneasy for fear that Egan and them restless fellers that's stopping with him would stumble onto them ducks and skeer them away. What brung them here, I'd like to know! They don't stay nowhere. They're all over the bay in a minute, and I can't go any place without meeting 'em. I've kinder suspicioned that they're watching me."

"And so they are," explained Lester, who was always glad of an opportunity to say something spiteful about the boy he did not like. "That Don Gordon would blow on you in a minute if he could. He lives near me in Mississippi, and I dread the idea of going home, just because he will be there. I'd give something handsome if he could be sent so far out of the country that he would never find his way back again."

"That's easy done," said Barr, as he ran the bow of his canoe upon the beach and held it there with his paddle, so that the boys could get out. "How much would you be willing to give?"

"He said last night that he would give a thousand dollars," observed Jones.

"Would you, now?" said Barr, looking earnestly at Lester.

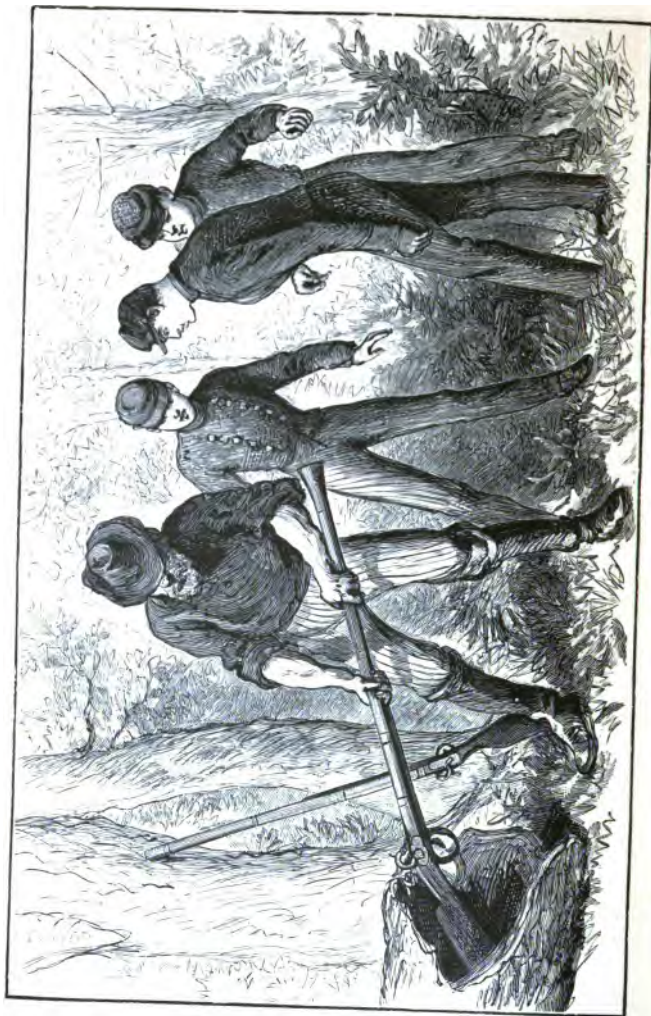
"Yes, I would," replied the latter, little dreaming what desperate thoughts his idle words had aroused in the mind of the man before him. "He and his brother have snubbed me until I am tired of it. Although I am one of his nearest neighbors, and have been to school with him for two years, Don has never given me a helping hand."

"Well, Egan has served me the same way," chimed in Enoch. "Instead of helping *me*, he picked up that Don Gordon, who was one of the biggest rascals in the school, and he and Curtis and Hopkins have boosted him along until they have made him lieutenant-colonel of the academy battalion. Where is the big gun, Mr. Barr? I should like to have my friends see it, if you don't object."

"All right," replied Barr. "I'll take my double-barrel along, so that we can see them together."

So saying, the duck-shooter led the way down a well-beaten path, which ran from his door, through





BARR'S BIG GUN FOUND.

the clearing into the woods behind the cabin. He followed a zig-zag course through the thick bushes for the distance of a quarter of a mile or more, and finally stopped beside a fallen log, which lay about a stone's throw from the path. The log was hollow, and the big gun was snugly hidden on the inside. With much tugging and panting Barr pulled it out, and raised it to a perpendicular, so that his visitors could have a fair view of it. After that, to show them how big it was, he stood his heavy duck gun up beside it. The contrast made Jones and Lester open their eyes.

"I couldn't be hired to fire off that thing," said the latter. "I should think the recoil would break one's shoulder all to pieces."

Enoch and Barr laughed loudly.

"You surely don't imagine that this cannon is fired like an ordinary gun, do you?" exclaimed the former. "Why, man alive, it takes a quarter of a pound of powder and a pound and a half of shot to load it. More than that, it weighs seventy-five pounds."

"It's the biggest thing in the shape of a gun I ever saw," said Jones.

“And yet it is a toy when compared with one the detectives, who were sent down from Baltimore, seized last year,” answered Enoch. “That one was ten feet long, weighed a hundred and sixty pounds, and cost a small fortune to men who have to make their living the way Barr does. These big guns bring them in their bread and butter, and you can imagine how friendly they feel toward such fellows as Gus Egan, who interfere with their business. These wild-fowl belong to nobody, and I say that a man has the right to get as many of them as he can, and in any way he can.”

If Enoch had taken the trouble to interview Gus Egan on this subject, he would have found, to his great surprise, no doubt, that he did not know what he was talking about. The ex-sergeant could have told him that all wild game is the property of the State, and that the people at large, and not single individuals, are the ones who have the right to say when and how it shall be killed or captured.

“Them’s my sentiments,” said Barr, “and I ain’t going to let no sportsmen’s clubs who live up north come down here and tell me what I

shall and what I shan't do. They want fun, but I want grub."

"And you ought to have it," said Lester. "What would Gus Egan's father say if you should go over to his house and tell him that he must stop raising cattle and horses for the Philadelphia markets?"

"I reckon he'd kick me off'n the place, if he was big enough," answered Barr, "and the law wouldn't tech him for it; but if he should come over to my shanty and tell me that I must quit shooting ducks, and I should take him by the collar and show him the way down the beach to his boat, he'd have me arrested for 'sault and battery. I don't see no sense in such laws."

"There's no justice in them, certainly," Jones remarked. "Now how do you shoot this thing?"

"You saw that little lead-colored skiff on board Barr's sloop, didn't you?" asked Enoch, in reply. "Well, that skiff can be navigated in the water, or put on runners and shoved over the ice. The stock of this gun is braced against a block in the bow, so that the recoil sends the boat back through the water. If the skiff should happen to get foul of a log or a cake of ice, so that it could

not move, it would be kicked all to pieces. One fair shot at a flock is all a man can reasonably expect to get in one night; if he gets two, he's rich."

When Lester and Jones had examined the big gun to their satisfaction, Barr put it back in its hiding-place, and scattered a few chunks of wood carelessly around the base of the log so that the hollow was partly concealed. Then they went slowly back to the cabin, arriving there just in time to see the Magpie (that was the name of the police-boat which carried off one of Barr's big guns the day before) turn her bow toward the creek, as if she intended to make a landing there. Barr gave utterance to some heavy adjectives and then went into his cabin, from which he presently emerged with a bag over his shoulder and a forked stick in his hand. Lester and Jones, who began to feel the weight of the secret with which they had been intrusted, looked frightened, but Enoch was as cool as a cucumber.

"You fellows keep quiet and let Barr and me do the talking," said he, as he seated himself on the bench beside the door. "We have come here after terrapins, and Barr is just going out to

catch some for us. That's what he's got his bag and stick for."

But Barr did not go out after terrapins. He only made preparations to go, so that he could readily account for the presence of his visitors in case the officers demanded to know why they were there.

The Magpie ran into the creek and stopped alongside the sloop to which the sink-boat was made fast; but they couldn't touch that, Enoch said, because Barr was a licensed gunner as well as an illegal one. Barr himself knew better, but still he pretended to be very much surprised and angry when he saw an officer board the sloop, cast off the painter with which the sink-boat was made fast, and toss it to a man who was standing on the steamer's forecastle.

"What are you about there?" he demanded, in savage tones. "You don't want to handle things with so much looseness, or you may run against a snag, the first thing you know."

"If you will send off that canoe so that I can get ashore, I will tell you what I am doing, and why I am doing it," answered the officer, with the most provoking coolness.

"Well, I won't do it," was Barr's reply. "Nobody wants you ashore, but if you are bound to come, you can call away one of your own boats."

"All right. It will not be much trouble to do that. Put the dingy into the water, Bob," said the officer, addressing some one on board the steamer. "Then make the falls fast to this sink-box, haul her up to the davits and take her aboard."

"Barr, that's the last of your boat," whispered Enoch. "Your license has been revoked."

"And it's all Egan's fault—and Don Gordon's," said Lester. "If they hadn't stumbled upon that big gun yesterday——"

"They're all to blame for it," hissed Barr, through his clenched teeth, "and if I don't make the last one of them wish that they had kept their fingers out of my dish, I'm a Dutchman."

Having seen the sink-boat disposed of, the officer turned his attention to the skiff which was lying bottom up on the sloop's deck. He pulled it over so that he could see the inside of it, and the first thing his eyes rested upon was the

padded block which served as a brace for the stock of the big gun.

"Here's another craft we want, boys," said he. "Take it aboard."

By the time this order had been obeyed the dingy came around the steamer's stern, and drew up alongside the sloop so that the officer could get in. She brought with her, besides the sailor who was sculling her, a big-whiskered man dressed in citizen's clothes, who had not before showed himself.

"I never set eyes on that man until this moment," whispered Enoch, "but I'll bet anything I've got that he is a Baltimore detective."

"I know he is," answered Barr, giving emphasis to his assertion with one of his heaviest oaths. "But he can't hurt me this trip. I stood my trial and paid my fine last season, and nobody can't prove that I've been big-gunning since. Remember, boys, that it wasn't my gun they gobbled yesterday."

"Of course it wasn't," said Enoch. "You don't know who owned it, and neither do we."

At this moment the dingy's bow ran high upon

the beach, and the officer sprang out, followed by the detective.

“Mr. Barr,” said the former, “your license to shoot for market in these waters has been revoked.”

“What for?” demanded Barr, doubling his huge fists and scowling at the officer as if he wanted to knock him down.

“You have been slaughtering wild-fowl contrary to law,” was the answer.

“I hain’t, nuther, and you can’t prove it,” Barr almost shouted. “Show me the man that says so, and I’ll show you a man that will be whopped before he can get the words out of his mouth.”

“That’s just the point,” replied the officer, calmly. “If I could prove it on you, it would be my duty to arrest you at once. That skiff is pretty good evidence——”

“It’s one I had left from last year—one that you and your big Baltimore detectives were not smart enough to find,” interrupted Barr.

“Well, we’ve found it now, and you are not likely to use it again very soon. Why didn’t you take the block out of it?”

“Kase I didn’t want to—that’s why. I’ll see

whether or not I won't use it again to pick up the ducks I shoot over my decoys. I'll have that sink-boat and my license back, too. I'll go up to Havre de Grace to-morrow, and if you can't make out a case against me, I'll have you took up for a thief."

"It may be possible that I shall want you to go back with me to-day," said the officer, drawing a legal document from his breast-pocket.

"That there is a search warrant, I 'spose," growled Barr.

"That is just what it is. I want to see if you haven't got another big gun stowed away somewhere about your premises."

"Go ahead and sarch till you are blind, if you want to," said Barr, angrily. "If you find anything around here that the law don't allow me to have, I'll eat it. I don't know who it is that's making all this furse for me, but if I can find out, I'll have him brought before the justice to-morrow. I got into a muss last year trying to make grub for my family, and I've been doing as near right as I knowed how ever since."

"No doubt of it," answered the officer, in a tone which implied that there was considerable

doubt about it. "By the way, Barr, how much did that big gun we found on Powell's Island yesterday cost you?"

"Twan't mine. I never knew you had found one till these young chaps told me," said Barr, and these were the only truthful words he uttered during the interview.

"Yes, I saw these boys there, and I noticed that they seemed to take a good deal of interest in the proceeding."

"Was there anything so very strange in that?" asked Enoch, boldly. "We wanted to see what a big gun looked like."

The boys did not at all like the look the officer gave them as he put his warrant back into his pocket and went into the cabin. It seemed to say that he knew they could tell all about that big gun and its owner if they were disposed to do so.

Barr's house received a thorough overhauling. The police-officer and the detective were experts, and there was not a nook or crevice that they did not look into. They even examined the boards in the floor to see if any of them had been recently nailed down; but their search was in vain.

Then they came out and searched the clearing, looking under every stump and log in it, and pulling down the brush-heaps, which they left for Barr to pile up again, and finally they found the path that led to the big gun's place of concealment. Lester and Jones looked frightened when they saw them disappear in the bushes, but Enoch and Barr were perfectly unconcerned.

"There's no cause for alarm yet," said the former. "The path leads to a spring, and ends in a pasture where Barr keeps his cow. The gun is so securely hidden that they will never find it. They stand as much chance of being struck by lightning."

"Did that officer mean to say that Mr. Barr will not be permitted to shoot ducks any more?" inquired Lester.

"He might as well have said so," answered Enoch, "for if his license is taken away from him, there will be nothing left for him except point shooting."

"What's that?"

"Why, standing on a point that juts into the bay, and shooting ducks as they fly over. But Barr couldn't do that, because the most of the

points are leased to clubs, and those that are reserved, are protected by their owners, who will prosecute anybody who sets foot on them. The law regarding trespass is very strict in this State."

Enoch's prediction was verified about a quarter of an hour later, for the officers came out of the woods empty-handed. They had not found the big gun, and Enoch assured his companions that they would hear it speak to the ducks that night.

"But suppose these officers should take it into their heads to watch us," said Jones. "What then?"

"Let 'em watch," replied Enoch. "Who cares? You don't for a moment imagine that they would find the big gun, do you? Not by a long shot. The instant they showed themselves the gun would be dropped overboard."

"And lost?" exclaimed Lester.

"By no means. As soon as the coast was clear, Barr would go back and drag for it. It's very often done."

The near approach of the officers put a stop to the conversation. Lester expected them to look crest-fallen over their failure, but they didn't.

They were talking and laughing with each other, and were apparently in the best of spirits.

"Well, Barr," said the one who had the warrant, "you've made a good job of hiding that unlawful weapon, but I give you fair warning that we are bound to have it, sooner or later."

"Then you'll get it of somebody besides me," growled the duck-shooter. "I tell you that I ain't got no big gun, and I don't know nobody who has."

"I do," answered the officer, "and when I get my hands on it, I will show it to you. This big-gunning is against the law, and it's got to be broken up. If you knew which side your bread was buttered on, you would never fire that big gun again. Can't you see that you are killing the goose that lays the golden egg? The first thing you know there will be no ducks for you to shoot, and you will have to look up some other way of making a living."

"I know as well as you do that there won't be no birds here after a while," answered Barr, bitterly, "and it will be all along of them city sportsmen who come down here and shoot for fun."

The big-gunner began swearing lustily, and the

officers, seeing that it would be of no use to argue the point with him, got into the dingy and pushed off to the sloop, which they searched as thoroughly as they had searched the house, but, of course, without finding anything. Then they went on board the Magpie, which backed out of the creek and turned her prow toward Havre de Grace.

CHAPTER XIV.

"I'LL TROUBLE YOU FOR THEM THOUSAND."

WHEN the police-boat disappeared around the point the boys drew a long breath of relief, and the duck-shooter arose from his seat on the bench and put away his bag and stick. The satisfied grin they saw on his face kept back the words of sympathy and condolence that arose to their lips.

"I've kinder been looking for this ever since you-uns told me that they had found that big gun on Powell's Island," said Barr. "Now it's over with, and I'm glad on't. I'll have them things they took away from me back agin. They can't tell me to hand over my license until they prove that I've been going agin the law, and that's something they can't do. Nobody ain't seen me shoot a big gun this season, and nobody won't see me, nuther."

"Does he mean to say that we can't go with him to-night?" whispered Lester, as the duck-shooter walked down to the beach and pulled his canoe out of the water.

"Oh, no," replied Enoch. "He will let us go, but still we won't see him fire the big gun, because it will be so dark that we can't see anything."

"Did that officer have any right to take those boats in the way he did?" asked Jones. "To me it looked like a very high-handed proceeding."

"Well, it wasn't. They knew what they were about. City policemen very often arrest people on what they call 'general principles'; that is, because they look suspicious or act so. These officers have the same authority. If Barr had been an unlicensed gunner, they would have arrested him for having that sink-boat in his possession; but as he has a permit to use it on certain days of the week, they could only take it away from him because they suspected him of big-gunning. If they fail to make out a case against him, Barr will get his boat back. He's going to put a block in his canoe and use that to-night, in place of the skiff he lost."

Enoch and his friends, who had come prepared to stay all day, sat on the bench and watched Barr while he was at work on his canoe, and when dinner-time came they gave him a liberal portion of their lunch, in return for the terrapin which he roasted for them on the coals. They spent the afternoon in lounging on the beach and listening to Barr, who would tell a thrilling story of the dangers he had seen, and the narrow escapes he had had from destruction by the elements and capture by the police-boats, and then stop to rail at Gus Egan and his party, for finding his big gun and giving it up to the officers of the Magpie. He repeatedly declared that he would make them sorry for that, and the boys, especially Lester Brigham, would have been very badly frightened if they had known how deeply in earnest he was when he said it. Enoch knew that the duck-shooter was a man who never made idle threats. He was suspected of many dark deeds, any one of which would have landed him in the penitentiary if it could have been fastened upon him, but he never dreamed that Barr had resolved to turn his hand to something besides incendiarism this time, and that the idea had been suggested to him by the

spiteful words that Lester Brigham had spoken against Don Gordon.

The hours of day-light passed slowly away, and finally darkness and a thick fog settled down over the bay. That suited Barr, who, like an owl, was lazy and slothful while the sun shone, and full of life and activity when it was out of sight. The first thing he did was to bring out his big gun, which he proceeded to charge with a load that made Lester and Jones open their eyes, and caused the former to predict that there wouldn't be anything left of the canoe after that ponderous weapon had been fired in it. Then they went out to the sloop, and after the canoe had been hauled aboard, and the big gun placed close beside the rail, so that it could be quickly thrown overboard, in case the Magpie or one of her consorts should chance to be hovering about, the sails were hoisted and the little craft moved slowly out of the creek.

Bush River, the place at which Barr expected to load his sloop with a single discharge of his big gun, was ten miles away, and if they had been obliged to depend solely upon the wind, they would not have reached it before day-light; but

the tide was in their favor, and carried them ahead at such a rate that at the end of two hours Barr began looking out for his "partner."

"He's around here somewhere," said the duck-shooter, who seemed to know right where he was, although the fog and the darkness were so dense that he could not see more than twenty feet ahead of the sloop's bow. "You see, he has been here all day watching them ducks, to keep other fellers away, and to make sure that they were going to stay long enough for me to have a pop at them."

"I don't see how he could keep other fellows away," observed Lester.

"Oh, he couldn't keep a party of 'gentlemen sportsmen' from firing into them, if they should happen along," answered Enoch. "He isn't expected to do that; but Barr isn't the only big-gunner on the bay, and if one of that class should discover the flock, the watcher would say: 'Those are my ducks,' and the other fellow would sheer off and let them alone. There's honor even among duck-shooters, you know."

"Enoch, give one of your low, shrill whistles," said Barr, "and mebbe that'll make him show up."

The boy complied with the request, and presently an answering whistle came through the fog. Pete—that was the “partner’s” name—was on the alert, but he did not know which way to go to find the sloop. Enoch replied to all his signals, which were given at short intervals, and in a few minutes his canoe shot out of the fog and came alongside. Its occupant seemed surprised to find so large a crew aboard the sloop, but he made no remark. He knew that Barr was much too suspicious to bring any outsiders with him on an expedition like this unless he was sure they could be trusted.

“Well,” said Barr, as his partner sprang over the rail and motioned to Enoch to lend a hand in hauling his canoe aboard, “how is everything in the river?”

“Everything is all right,” was the encouraging response. “The bed is still there, but the wind is changing, and as soon as the fog begins to lift and the tide to turn, they’ll be off.”

“Not all of ’em, I reckon,” answered Barr, with a laugh. “Seen anything of the Magpie?”

Pete replied that he had seen her go toward Havre de Grace about eleven o’clock that morn-

ing; and then Barr went on to tell how the officers had searched his cabin and ground for the big gun he was to use that night, interlarding his sentences with so many frightful imprecations and threats against the boys who had been the cause of all his trouble, that Lester shuddered while he listened. Still he wished it had been Don Gordon, instead of Gus Egan, who had incurred the duck-shooter's enmity.

"I shouldn't care much what happened to him, so long as he wasn't hurt," thought Lester. "I simply wish that his path and mine might never cross each other again. I can't bear the sight of him. I don't want to see him strutting around with those silver leaves on his shoulders, while I haven't so much as a corporal's stripes to be happy over."

As soon as Pete's canoe had been hauled aboard, the sloop filled away on her course. She had but a short distance farther to run, and at the end of another half hour the sails were quietly lowered, and the preparations for the coming slaughter were quickly completed. Barr's canoe was put into the water, the big gun lowered into it, and then the duck-shooter stretched himself out flat

on the bottom, and with a short paddle, somewhat resembling a pudding-stick, in each hand, moved silently away into the darkness.

"I don't see any ducks," whispered Lester, after he had tried in vain to locate the flock.

"Neither do I ; neither does Barr, yet," replied Enoch. "But they are out there somewhere. Now keep perfectly still, and stand by to lend a hand with the sails the minute you hear the gun speak. After the ducks are killed, we can't pick them up and get away from here any too quick."

"Why not ?" asked Lester, who was trembling with excitement.

"How do we know but there may be a police-boat within hailing distance of us ?" asked Enoch, in reply. "If there is, she will come at us like a hawk at a June bug, and we want to hold ourselves in readiness to run."

"But if it should chance to be the Magpie, she could easily overhaul us," Jones remarked. "She goes by steam, while we have nothing but this very light breeze to depend on."

"She might catch us, and then again she might not," said Enoch, who did not seem to be at all

uneasy. "This little sloop can be pushed ahead at a pretty fair rate of speed with a pair of long sweeps, and this fog is in our favor. The Magpie might have hard work to find us. We could hear her exhaust, and that would make it easy for us to keep out of her way ; but we should move so silently that she couldn't follow us."

Enoch, who knew just what ought to be done and how to do it, assisted Pete to get his canoe overboard, and then the boys leaned against the rail and waited in silence to see what was going to happen. Barr had been gone fully a quarter of an hour, and nothing had been heard of him ; but now a light shot up through the darkness, glowed brightly for a moment and then disappeared. The boys could not tell where it came from—they could only see its reflection in the fog.

"What was it ?" whispered Jones.

"The flash of a dark-lantern," answered Enoch. "Barr is trying to find the ducks. Some hunters ignite a pinch of gun-powder, but a lantern is much better because——"

Just then the air was rent by a terrific concussion, followed almost instantly by a roar, which

sounded so much like the noise made by an approaching storm, that Lester could scarcely refrain from crying out, so frightened was he. The first was the report of the big gun, and the second was the tumult made by the survivors of the flock, as they arose in the air and sought safety in flight. Jones and Lester were full of questions, but Enoch and Pete could not stop to answer them. The latter sprang into his canoe and paddled away with all speed, to assist in picking up the ducks that had fallen before the murderous fire of Barr's blunderbuss, while Enoch ran forward and seized the jib halliards.

"Lend a hand here," said he, in low but excited tones. "This is a dangerous moment, and we must be ready to show our heels at an instant's warning. We have given notice over a wide stretch of country that we are here, and if there are any police about, they will be along directly. No, there were not millions in the flock, but there were thousands, undoubtedly. I never heard such a roar of wings before."

"What will Barr do with his ducks after he has picked them up?" inquired Jones, as he gave a pull at the port sheet, while Enoch belayed the

balliard. "I should think he would be afraid to take them to market."

"Oh, no, he won't. He'll take them up to Havre de Grace and sell them to a man who will ship them north, or to Baltimore. Shall we go with him, or go back to the Firefly and turn in for the night?"

"Didn't you tell me that the detectives who are sent down here to break up this night-shooting make their headquarters at Havre de Grace?" asked Lester.

Enoch believed he had made some such remark.

"Then I say, let's go back to the Firefly!" exclaimed Lester, who, having seen one detective that day, did not want to see another, for fear that he might ask some questions that he would not care to answer. Enoch laughed at his fears, but agreed to go back, because there wasn't any fun to be seen in sailing twenty miles before a light breeze on a dark night, just to see a boat-load of ducks sold.

When the mainsail had been hoisted, Enoch went to the wheel, and the sloop moved into the river to pick up the canoes, whose positions were pointed out by occasional flashes of light from

Barr's lantern. Pete, who was the first to come alongside, said, in response to Enoch's inquiries, that they had secured seven dozen and three birds. How many had escaped to die of their wounds in the marshes, or to be eaten by sea-gulls, weasels or foxes, Pete didn't state. The "gentlemen sportsmen," of whom Enoch had so lightly spoken, always made it a point to allow no injured bird to get away if they could help it; but these two professionals did not belong to that class. They took care of the dead, and left the wounded to look out for themselves.

"Eighty-seven birds at one fire!" exclaimed Lester, who was profoundly astonished.

"That's nothing," replied Enoch. "The big gun I told you of this morning has been known to knock over more than a hundred at one shot. Where's Barr?"

"Gone ashore to hide the gun," answered Pete. "If you and your pardners will help with these ducks, we'll pick him up and get out of this as quick as we know how."

Enoch and his companions, who were quite as anxious to put a safe distance between themselves and Bush River as Pete was, willingly assisted

him in unloading his canoe and stowing the ducks on board the sloop. This work being done, they set out in search of Barr, who, having concealed his gun so that he could easily find it again when he returned from Havre de Grace, pulled the slide of his lantern now and then to show them where he was. He was glad to let Enoch have his canoe to go back to the Firefly, for it saved him the trouble of hiding it in the marshes. Bold as he was, Barr would have thought twice before taking it to Havre de Grace on board the sloop. If the officers who visited his cabin that morning should happen to get a glimpse of it, they would know what he had been doing, for the recoil-block, which was not there when they saw the canoe, would condemn him at once.

When Barr sprang aboard his sloop, the boys dropped down into the canoe, and the two crafts moved away in opposite directions, both reaching their destinations without any mishap, but not without some exertion. Barr spent a good deal of time in dodging the Magpie, whose familiar exhaust betrayed her presence, and the boys were obliged to paddle almost twice ten miles, following, as they did, all the windings of the shore

in order to keep their bearings. They were tired enough when they climbed over the Firefly's rail, and too sleepy to make up the bunks, so they threw themselves down on the floor of the cabin, and with their hats and boots for pillows, slept soundly until Barr's hoarse voice aroused them. They woke up long enough to hear him tell of his adventure with the Magpie, and then went off into dream-land again, where they stayed until nearly eight o'clock. By that time they were hungry, and the remains of their lunch, supplemented by a "diamond back," which Barr roasted for them, only served to give them a sharper appetite for their dinner. The duck-shooter was in excellent spirits. He and his partner had made twenty dollars apiece by their night's work. During the run from Havre de Grace they had spied another big bed, and Pete had remained behind to watch it. But this announcement did not tempt the boys to stay and go out on another night expedition. They were all tired and hungry, and two of them had seen as much of law-breakers and their ways as they cared to see for some time to come ; so they filled away for home, passing close enough to the Sallie to see that

she was still above water, and that Egan and his guests were making ready to go somewhere in her.

Enoch and his friends spent the rest of the day in doing nothing, and very hard work they found it; but the day following brought excitement with it, and much more than they wanted, too. As they could think of no better way of passing the time, they set sail in the Firefly at an early hour, intending to spend the day in camp on Powell's Island, and to knock over any ducks that might happen to come in their way; but their hearts were not in the work, and the bag they took home with them was not worth bragging about. Enoch and Jones, who were very fine shots, managed to kill half a dozen birds between them, but Lester missed every one he fired at. The day was raw and windy, and Lester, who did the most of his shooting and fishing with his mouth, found much more pleasure in hugging the camp-fire than he did in exposing himself to the keen blasts, which could not have been a great deal colder if they had come off an iceberg. He was glad when Enoch announced that it was time to go home, but when he got there, he wished that he had

gone as straight as he could to Havre de Grace and taken the first train for Cairo. The schooner had hardly stopped at her moorings when Barr appeared as if by magic. The first hint they had of his presence was a low "how dy, boys," and, upon looking up, they saw him peering over the rail, to which he held fast with both hands, in order to keep his canoe in position.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Enoch. "Where did you drop down from, and what do you want here in broad day-light?"

"I have been in that there cove waiting for you, and I want to see Brigham," was the reply.

"What do you want to see me for?" demanded Lester, who was not a little nettled by the man's familiarity.

"Come over here, and I'll tell you," said the duck-shooter; and the way he said it aroused the boys' curiosity to the highest pitch. They moved to the side, and Barr continued, as he nodded his head toward Enoch and Jones: "You don't mind if these fellers hear it, I suppose?"

"Certainly not," answered Lester, whose surprise began to give way to alarm. "I am per-

fectly willing they should hear anything you have to say to me."

"Well, then," said Barr, and the boys afterward told one another that there was something like a defiant ring in his voice as he uttered the words, "I'll trouble you for them thousand."

"That thousand!" repeated Lester, with no suspicion of the truth in his mind. "What thousand?"

"Have you forgot all about it so soon?" exclaimed Barr, angrily. "I ain't, if you have. I mean them thousand dollars you said you would give if somebody would send that Don Gordon so far out'n the country that you wouldn't never see him no more. Remember it now, I reckon, don't you?"

Lester was thunder-struck. He tried to speak, but the words he would have uttered seemed to stick fast in his throat. He reeled as if Barr had dealt him a stunning blow, and would have fallen to the deck if he had not clung to the rail for support.

"Great Scott! what have you done?" cried Enoch, who was the first to recover the use of his tongue.

"I've give Gus Egan something to busy himself with, so that he will have no time to spend in running around and skeering away my ducks," said Barr, savagely. "He didn't seem to know how to spend his vacation, but he won't be troubled that way no more."

"But what have you done?" repeated Enoch. "And if you have been guilty of any rascality, why do you come here to tell us of it? I am sure that we are in no way interested in your affairs."

"Ain't you, now?" cried Barr, who seemed to be so sure of his ground that even Enoch began to be frightened. "If you ain't interested in the matter, Brigham is, for a fact. He said he would be willing to pay liberal if that Gordon boy was sent away, so't he wouldn't never see him no more, and I——"

"And did you think I was in earnest when I said it?" Lester almost shouted. He began to understand what the duck-shooter was trying to get at, and his intense alarm took away all his strength and pretty near all his wits. He sat down on the Firefly's deck and looked about him as if he were trying to make up his mind which way he could run first.

"Did I think you was in 'arnest?" repeated Barr. "Of course I did. If you wasn't, you had no business to say what you did. I have done the work, and I want my money."

"But what have you done?" said Enoch, again. "Where is Don Gordon now?"

"He's on his way to Chiny," was the astounding reply, "and he won't come back to trouble none of you for three long years, at least."

"Then you kidnapped him and put him aboard a vessel?" said Enoch.

"I did, for a fact."

"You didn't hurt him?"

"Well, as to that, I can't say for certain," answered Barr, reflectively. "He fought so uncommon hard that for a time it looked as though he was going to whop the pair of us, and Pete had to quiet him with a rap on the head. Pete afterward said he was sorry he teched him, for he was pluck to the back-bone, and he'd bet he was a good feller."

"Then why didn't you let him go?" demanded Enoch, who did the most of the talking. Jones and Lester were so nearly stunned by the startling

piece of news Barr had brought them, that they hardly knew what they were doing.

“We couldn’t let him go, kase we’d gone too far,” replied the duck-shooter. “He’d have taken the law on us the minute he got loose. Now, Brigham, what are you going to do about it?”

“He won’t do anything about it,” said Enoch, who saw that Lester could not speak for himself. “He didn’t tell you that he wanted Don Gordon shanghaied and sent off to China, and if you have done any such mad work as that, which I don’t believe, you need not expect him to pay you for it.”

“That’s it,” cried Lester, who was quick to catch at the idea Enoch had thrown out. “You never did it. You took advantage of some thoughtless words we uttered yesterday, and have cooked up this story to extort money from me. But you have reckoned without your host. I haven’t got a thousand cents ; so there, now.”

The duck-shooter’s eye had a dangerous look in it, but he answered very calmly :

“You can’t creep out of no little hole like that. I done the work you said you wanted done, and it won’t be long before you will hear somebody else

say so. After you have had time to find out that I have told you the truth, I shall come for my money, and I expect to get it, too. I do, for a fact."

So saying, Barr sat down in his canoe and paddled away, leaving three badly-frightened boys behind him. They were so bewildered that they could not think clearly. The only facts they could grasp were that Don Gordon had been kidnapped and shipped off to China, and that Barr wanted a thousand dollars for it. Enoch, as before, was the first to speak.

"Lester," said he, "if that man told the truth, I wouldn't be in your boots for all the money there is in America."

"Neither would I," Jones managed to articulate.

"I never said 'thousand dollars' to him once," exclaimed Lester, with a little show of spirit. "I don't believe he would dare do such a thing, any way."

"You don't know that man. There's nothing he dare not do if he thinks there is money in it. But we shall soon know the truth," said Enoch, in a trembling voice. "Here comes the Sallie!"

Jones and Lester looked up, and sure enough there was Egan's cutter coming down before a brisk breeze, with all her canvas spread. There was something aggressive in the way she cut through the water, headed directly for the schooner, and Lester's heart sank within him, while his head sank below the rail.

"I think myself that the best thing you can do is to keep out of sight," said Enoch. "Egan wants to speak to us, and one glimpse of your face would betray you, as sure as you're a foot high."

Enoch's face was a good deal whiter than it usually was, but he had the nerve to carry him through an ordeal that Lester could not have braved to save his life. He pretended to be at work at something about the windlass, and when the expected hail came he was ready to answer it.

CHAPTER XV.

A SWIM FOR LIBERTY.

"**F**IREFLY, there!" shouted Egan, from the deck of the cutter, which had been thrown up into the wind a short distance away.

"On board the Sallie!" replied Enoch.

"Did you see anything of Don Gordon yesterday?" continued Egan.

"I saw him with the rest of you, while you were preparing to get under way," was the prompt reply. "But I haven't seen him since."

"Well, this bangs me," said Egan, turning to his companions, all of whom were gathered about him in the standing-room. If Enoch had needed any further evidence to satisfy him that the duck-shooter had told nothing but the truth, he could have found it in their faces.

"What's the matter with Don?" said he. He knew that the surest way to avoid suspicion was

to appear to take an interest in the matter. Besides, he wanted to hear some of the particulars of the kidnaping, for he hadn't thought to ask Barr to go into the details.

"We hope there is nothing the matter with him," answered Egan, "but we are beginning to feel very anxious. He disappeared suddenly yesterday afternoon, and we haven't been able to find the least trace of him."

"Where did you see him last?" inquired Enoch, whose self-control was really wonderful. Don was gone—there was no doubt about that—and his friend Lester was the remote cause of any trouble he might have got into. What was to be done about it? That was the question that Enoch was trying to answer while he waited for Egan's reply.

"We last saw him on Conesus Creek," said Egan. "We started yesterday morning for Spesutia Island, intending to camp out for a few days. When we arrived nearly opposite the mouth of the creek, we discovered a flock of swans in the bay above, and landed to have a shot at them; and that was the last we saw of Don Gordon. There was no possible chance for him to get

drowned, even if he were not the expert swimmer he is, and if he managed to lose himself, he can use his tongue in recovering his bearings ; so we confidently expect that he will turn up all right during the course of the day, but it would relieve our suspense if we could gain some clue to his whereabouts. May we depend upon you to lend him a hand if you happen to strike him anywhere ? ”

“ Indeed you may,” replied Enoch ; and he meant every word of it. He began to see what a despicable fellow he was. We can’t tell how his eyes came to be opened just at that minute, but we know that such things do happen sometimes, and very suddenly, too. What had Don and his friends done to him that he should hate them so cordially ? He couldn’t point to a single thing.

“ We thank you for that assurance,” said Egan, as the Sallie came about and started back up the bay. “ If Don should unfortunately be in trouble, I don’t know of any one I would rather have find him than you, for I have seen your pluck tested. Good-bye, and may you have better luck than we have had so far.”

For once, Enoch saluted, and Egan and his companions were prompt to return it. As the former walked back to the cockpit, in which Lester and Jones were sitting, he pulled off his hat and beat his own head with his fist.

"Take that for your foolishness," said he, addressing himself in savage tones, "and learn to have more sense in future."

"What in the world is the matter?" exclaimed Jones, who wondered if his friend had suddenly gone crazy.

"Say, Lester," began Enoch, without stopping to reply to the question, "you heard what Egan said to me, of course? Then I hope you fully realize what a muss you have got into. I tell you plainly that Barr is a bad man. I don't for a moment believe that he thought you were in earnest in what you said about Don, while we were at his cabin. My idea is that those ducks in Conesus Creek were the ones that Pete was to watch. Egan and his party came up and frightened them away, and Barr, accidentally stumbling upon Don, who had got bewildered in the marshes, made a prisoner of him out of a desire for revenge. Then he happened to think of what

you said about that money, and so he came here and demanded it."

"But what do you suppose he did with Don?" inquired Jones.

"I really believe that he shipped him off on some vessel; and if he did—by gracious, Lester, you had better go home."

"That's just what I want to do," whined Lester, who had already made up his mind that he would not pass another night in Maryland, if there were any way for him to get out of it.

"Because, if you stay here, you are bound to get into trouble," continued Enoch. "If you don't pay Barr, he will give you away to the police——"

"No!" gasped Lester.

"Yes, he will. I know him and you don't. General Gordon, of course, will offer a big reward, and Barr will do his best to earn it. If you hand over the money he demands——"

"But how *can* I?" cried Lester, who was so nearly overcome with terror, that he trembled in every limb. "What excuse can I make to my father for asking him for so large a sum of money?"

“You can’t pay it, and you mustn’t ask him for it; that much is settled; but you can go home, and my advice to you is to do it at once. If you should pay Barr the smallest amount, he would have a hold on you that he wouldn’t be slow to make use of. I tell you, fellows, this thing has opened my eyes, and from this time out I turn over a new leaf and mend my ways,” said Enoch, snatching up one of the cushions and banging the rail with it. “No more mean tricks do I engage in. I’ve got two years more at school, and I am going back next term to make up for misspent time. That’s a word with a bark on it.”

“And just the minute my back is turned, you will blow on me, will you?” cried Lester. “I haven’t done anything the law can take hold of me for.”

“I know you haven’t, but if Barr takes it into his head to do so, he can make the country about here unpleasantly warm for you, all the same. If you go home, he may think it to his best interests to keep still; and if he does, no one will ever suspect that you put such an idea into his mind. I shall not say a word about it, and neither will Jones.”

“What apology shall I make to your father and mother for going away at such short notice?”

“You needn’t make any. Leave it to me, and I will fix it all right. Pack your trunk as soon as you can, and I will take you up to Havre de Grace in the Firefly. I am sorry, indeed, that the visit from which you expected to derive so much pleasure, has ended in this way, but it is too late to remedy the matter now. I blame myself for taking you over to Barr’s cabin yesterday. If we had kept away from there, this thing would never have happened.”

“If Don should happen to turn up after all, you won’t lisp a word to lead him or any one else to suspect that I knew anything about his abduction, will you?”

“Not a word—not a blessed word. You may depend upon that.”

While the boys were talking in this way, they were paddling toward the shore in the canoe which Enoch used in going to and from the Firefly. When they reached the house, Lester went at once to his room, leaving Enoch to explain matters to his parents, which he did, by telling them that Lester had just heard some news that

he did not care to make public, but which rendered it necessary that he should start for Rochdale at the earliest possible moment. Mr. and Mrs. Williams were sorry to have him go before his visit was half over, and expressed the hope that he would return at some future time and finish it. This Lester promised to do, but without the least intention of keeping his word. If he once got safely out of Barr's way, he told himself, he would not willingly come in his path again. He was afraid of the duck-shooter, as he had reason to be, and it was not until Enoch's home had been left far behind, and the lights at Havre de Grace came into view, that he began to breathe easily again. But he wasn't clear of Barr yet, if he had only known it.

The wharf at which Enoch landed was brilliantly lighted, and a large force of men was engaged in loading a coaster that was almost ready to sail. Leaning against a snubbing-post close by, was the familiar figure of a man who seemed to take a deep interest in all that was going on around him, although what he could see that was new or novel in so simple a proceeding as the loading of a coasting vessel, Enoch could not

determine. The man was Barr, and Enoch discovered and recognized him just in time to warn Lester, who went down the companion-ladder in two jumps.

“What do you suppose he is doing here at this time of night?” asked Jones. “He ought to be out with that big gun.”

“He has some business on hand, you may depend upon that,” replied Enoch. “What it is, I can’t even guess; but I am sure on one point, and that is, if we want to get Lester to the depot without seeing trouble on the way, we must move away from here and land him at some pier higher up.”

“You don’t imagine that Barr would have anything to say about it, do you?” said Jones, who did not believe that the duck-shooter was reckless enough to raise a storm in which he was sure to be the chief sufferer.

“I know he would. If he saw Lester boarding the train, he would try to stop him by threatening him with exposure. Let’s get rid of Lester the easiest way we can, and then make a solemn promise that we will never have anything to do with another like him as long as we live.”

“Agreed,” said Jones, eagerly. “There’s my hand on it. I may not succeed in winning a warrant or a shoulder-strap next term, but I can show the teachers that I am sorry for what I have done, and mean to do better.”

“I wish we could begin by helping Don Gordon in some way,” said Enoch, looking sharply at the coaster, as the Firefly sailed slowly by her. “Say, Jones! Between you and me, I believe that Barr drew on his imagination when he declared that he had sent Don off to China. If I know anything, he is on board that schooner. That’s the reason Barr is hanging around her. He wants to see that Don doesn’t escape before she sails.”

These words fairly staggered Jones, who was so highly excited by them that he wasn’t of much use to Enoch, for he could give him no intelligent help in making the next landing. Fortunately, Enoch was a whole crew in himself, and he succeeded in bringing the Firefly alongside the pier unaided, but she bumped so hard that Lester came up out of the cabin to see what was the matter.

“The coast is clear now,” said Enoch. “Pass up your trunk, and we’ll carry it to the street and

see if we can find a carriage to take us to the depot. Jones, you stay here and keep an eye on the schooner."

Lester was so impatient to be off, that he wasted no time in taking leave of his friend Jones. He gave his hand a slight shake, said he hoped to meet him again at no distant day, and then turned to assist Enoch in getting his trunk over the side. They found a carriage at the nearest stand, and in a quarter of an hour more Lester was sitting in the waiting-room at the depot, with his check and a ticket for Cairo in his pocket.

"Well, good-by," said Enoch, holding out his hand.

"You are not going away now?" exclaimed Lester, beginning to grow frightened again. "I thought you would stay and see me off."

"Why, it will be two hours before the next train starts for Baltimore, and I must be well on my way home by that time," replied Enoch. "You are not afraid to stay alone? Barr won't come up here; you needn't worry about that. I will keep my eyes and ears open, and if I see or hear anything of Don, I will drop you a line. Good-by, and good luck to you."

Seeing that his companion was bound to go whether he liked it or not, Lester reluctantly pronounced the parting words, and Enoch vanished through the door. If Lester could have seen him as he ran down the street, he would have said that Enoch was in a great hurry to start for home, but he would have shot wide of the mark. Enoch was determined that he would not see home again until he had found out whether or not Don Gordon was a prisoner on that coaster, as Barr's actions led him to believe. If he were, he (Enoch) would have him released at once, or he would have Barr arrested for conspiracy, abduction, slaughtering ducks with big guns, and for almost everything else that was against the law.

"Don't do that," remonstrated Jones, who listened in great amazement, while his friend unfolded his plans. "If you do, he will certainly make you suffer for it."

"Can't help it if he does," answered Enoch, who was brave in every cause he espoused, whether good or bad. "I have played a mean part toward Don and Bert, just because I disliked Egan without a cause, and wanted to show that I was a friend to Lester, and if I can make amends

for it in any way, I am going to do it, I don't care a snap what happens to me."

"And I will stand by you," said Jones, "but I am afraid we can't be of any service. See there!"

Enoch looked in the direction indicated by his friend's finger, and saw that the coaster had taken advantage of a favorable tide to get under way. She was some distance from the pier already, and was beginning to feel the influence of the breeze.

"Cast off that bow-line and shove her head out while I run up the jib," exclaimed Enoch. "Work lively, now, and we can overhaul her before she begins to gather headway. We will show ourselves to Don if he is there, and all he's got to do is to make his presence known. Hurry up, for when she gets that big main-sail up and her top-sails set, she'll walk away from us hand over fist."

The attention of the two boys was so fully occupied with the work before them, that they did not see the commotion that arose on board the coaster all on a sudden, nor hear the words of command that were shouted at the sailors who

ran aft to man the yawl which had not yet been hoisted at the stern davits. But when Enoch took the helm, he saw at once that there was something unusual going on, for the coaster had "spilled" her sails, the two men in her yawl were rowing about first in one direction and then in another, their movements being directed by a third who was leaning over the bow with a lighted lantern in his hand.

"Go for'ard, quick, and listen with all your ears," commanded Enoch, who for once was so excited that he could scarcely speak plainly. "This is as good evidence as I want that we are on the right track. Don was on that coaster, but he is in the water now."

"There comes Barr," exclaimed Jones, who just at that moment caught sight of a canoe which shot out from the shadow of the pier the coaster had left a short time before. She was propelled by two men, who handled their paddles as if they were in a great hurry.

"There's more evidence," said Enoch. "Barr and his partner saw Don when he went overboard, and they are going out to help hunt him up. That proves that he could not have swum

under the pier ; if he had, they would have seen him. Don is probably holding a straight course for the middle of the bay, and taking his chances on being picked up. Give a pull at the sheets, fore and aft, and we'll stand farther out."

"I hope he'll not sink before we get to him," said Jones, as he hastened to obey the order.

"If all the boys say about him is true, we need have no fear on that score," was the encouraging reply. "He has swum the whole length of Diamond Lake more than once, and that must be four or five miles long. Listen !" added Enoch, in a suppressed whisper. "Didn't you hear some one hailing ?"

Jones hastened to the side and leaning as far over the water as he could without losing his balance, strained his eyes and ears in vain. The darkness was impenetrable, and no sound but the washing of the waves against the side of the schooner could be heard in the direction of the Eastern Shore. The surface of the bay was beginning to look threatening. The tide was running out against the wind, and the white-caps were making their appearance. In a few minutes the water would be so rough that Barr's canoe

would have to turn back; then what would become of Don Gordon? Strong swimmer as he was, his strength would soon be exhausted, and he would go down——

“Firefly ahoy!” came the hail, in low but distinct tones; whereupon Enoch and Jones jumped as if they had been shot.

“Get a rope, quick,” commanded the former, “and stand by to take the helm in case I have to go overboard to his assistance. Which way did that hail come from? Sing out again, Don. Sing out loud, so that I can locate you, and never mind those men in the yawl. They shan’t get their hands on you again.”

Don heard and understood, and this time Enoch could have pointed out the wave from which his answer came. So could Jones, who threw the rope he held in his hand with such accuracy that the end of it fell over his shoulder and was instantly seized by the swimmer, who was hauled to the side in less time than it takes to tell it. A moment later he was standing on the deck. He had relieved himself of all superfluous weight by discarding his coat, vest and boots while he was in the water, and he was

panting a little from the violence of his exertions ; but he was not at all frightened.

“ I have been shanghaied,” began Don, extending his hand to Enoch, who seized it and worked it up and down like a pump-handle.

“ No use to waste time in talking,” interrupted the latter. “ You’re too wet and this wind is too cold. Jones, take him into the cabin and give him something dry to put on. You will find my shooting duds in the starboard locker. Now for it,” he added, shutting his teeth hard, and glancing over his shoulder toward the yawl, which was coming on with all the speed that the brawny sailors who handled the oars could induce her to put forth. They had seen Don pulled out of the water, and the mate, the man who stood in the bow holding the lantern, supposed, of course, that the master of the schooner would stop and give him up ; but when he saw Enoch crowd his vessel until she lay over on her side and walked away from the yawl as if the latter had been standing still, the mate’s eyes were opened to the fact that the deserter had been rescued by friends who did not mean to surrender him if they could help it.

“Hold on there!” shouted the mate of the coaster, shaking his fist at Enoch. “That’s my man, and I’m going to have him.”

“Why don’t you come and get him, then?” asked Enoch. “Your best plan would be to mind your own business. If you come back to Havre de Grace again I will have the last one of you arrested. You, Barr,” he shouted, seeing that the duck-shooter was heading his canoe diagonally across the Firefly’s fore-foot in the hope of being able to board her as she passed, “keep your distance. I give you fair warning that I won’t luff by so much as a hair’s breadth.”

By this Enoch meant that he would not change the course of his vessel, and that if Barr’s canoe got in his way he would run over her. Barr stormed and threatened at a furious rate, and so did the mate; but Enoch was too busy to listen to them. His first care must be to put a safe distance between himself and the coaster. The latter was a much larger and swifter craft than his own, and if her captain took it into his head to come in pursuit, he had a crew at his back that was strong enough to overpower them in spite of all the resistance they could offer.

Enoch's best plan evidently was to depend upon strategy.

"Say, Jones," he called out, when he saw the coaster's yawl and Barr's canoe turn about and go back to the pier, "have you found those dry clothes for Don? Then come up and take in the lights. We've got to go it blind for a little while."

"Now, Enoch," said Don, "don't you put yourself or your craft in jeopardy on my account. You are liable to be run down if you don't show lights."

"Who's doing this?" demanded Enoch, good-naturedly. "You wear the brass collar at the academy, but I am boss here."

Don laughed and made all haste to get into the warm suit which Jones had taken from the locker, while the latter went on deck and took in the lanterns. It was well that Enoch had taken this precaution, for after the mate of the coaster had returned to his vessel and reported to his captain that the deserter had been rescued by a yacht that was running away with him, the skipper flew into a rage and declared that he would have him back if he had to waste a week in trying to find him; and when he got his hands

on him again wouldn't he haze him, though? He would make him know his place, or he would make him jump overboard in mid-ocean.

As the coaster was between the schooner and the lights on the wharf, Enoch could distinctly see every move she made, and he could hardly refrain from giving a shout of derision when he saw her flatten in her huge mainsail and start in pursuit of the Firefly. He did not know that the duck-shooter and his partner were on board the schooner, acting as advisers to the captain, but he suspected it, and laid his plans accordingly. When Don came up to lend a hand at the work, he stood off on the other tack, and in a few minutes the pursuing coaster was left out of sight. The wind was fresh now, and the Firefly, careening under the pressure of her heavy sails, bowled ahead through darkness which seemed to loom up before her like a solid wall of ebony.

"Now, Enoch, I know this is dangerous," protested Don, who admired Enoch's reckless way of doing things. "If one of those big Baltimore steamers should happen along she would run over us and never know it."

"What would a Baltimore steamer be doing

out here, I'd like to know ? ” said Enoch, in reply. “ Their path lies over there toward the city, and we are a good mile outside of it. We have nothing to fear except from little coasters, like the one that thinks she is following in our wake, and we shall see their lights in time to give them a wide berth.”

“ Where's Lester ? ” asked Don, suddenly. “ I haven't seen him since I came aboard.”

“ He went home to-night,” answered Enoch. “ He heard some news he didn't like, and put out for Rochdale at very short notice.”

“ I hope that none of his folks are ill,” said Don.

“ We didn't hear that they were. Lester was getting tired of the life we lead here, and homesick besides, and so I think it was the best thing he could do. Now, Don, where have you been since we last saw you ? Egan ran up in his cutter and hailed us this afternoon, saying that you had disappeared in some mysterious way, and asking us to keep our weather eyes open for you ; but he didn't think that you were going to be fished out of the bay, and neither did we. You came off that coaster, of course, but where did you

jump from? We didn't see you on deck when we passed her."

"I wasn't on deck; I was tied up in the cabin. But the minute the skipper released me, which he did as soon as the schooner began moving away from the wharf, I made a dive for one of the windows," said Don, who then went on to give a glowing account of his adventures, which we will relate in our own way.

CHAPTER XVI.

LOST IN THE MARSHES.

WE left Don and his party grumbling over the ill luck that had attended their efforts to entice the big flock of ducks they found off Powell's Island within range of their double-barrels; and Bogus, ole Eph's stump-tailed yellow dog, which had so faithfully performed his allotted task, trying to make them understand that it was through no fault of his that the wild fowl had gone off without giving them a chance for a shot. Egan accused his friends of showing the tops of their hats above the grass, but recalled the words when he discovered the Firefly coming around the head of the island. Egan was not aware that her crew had come down there on purpose to keep an eye on him and his party, but such we know to be the fact.

There being no more ducks in sight for Bogus

to try his arts upon, Egan proposed that they should take a short sail, and then go back to Eph's cabin and dine upon the terrapins which the old negro had been instructed to have ready for them ; but just then a flock of shore birds flew over, and at the suggestion of Hopkins, who thought a few willets would make an acceptable addition to their dinner, they shouldered their guns and set out in pursuit of them. It was while they were walking along the beach that they found Barr's big gun, which lay at the foot of a tree, covered with bushes and calamus grass. In the effort he made to step over it, Curtis kicked away some of the grass, thus exposing the stock of the gun to his astonished gaze.

“What in the name of all that's wonderful is this?” he exclaimed, backing away from the weapon as if he were afraid of it. “Why, Egan, I believe it is one of those big guns you told us about last night.”

It did not take Egan long to kick away the rest of the grass, and then he and Curtis got under the gun and raised it to a perpendicular, so that everybody in the party could have a good look at it. They examined it with the liveliest curiosity,

walking around it and viewing it from all sides ; and there was the crew of the Firefly, watching their movements through a spy-glass, and eager to report them to the owner of the gun, who was in his sink-box a few miles above.

“What are you going to do with it?” asked Bert, after he and the rest had looked the ponderous weapon over so closely that they were sure they would know a big gun the next time they saw one.

“I'd like to sink it so deep in the bay that nobody would ever find it again,” replied Egan. “But not being an officer, I have no right to touch it.”

“Is that steamer signaling to us?” asked Don.

Egan looked up and saw the Magpie approaching. Near the pilot-house stood a boy, who would flourish his handkerchief in the air for a minute or two, and then raise a pair of binoculars to his eyes to see if his motions had attracted the attention of the boys on shore.

“Hop, that's Bob Hart,” said he, after he had taken a good look at the boy ; and then he and Hopkins took off their hats and waved them over their heads. “He's a Baltimore lad,” added Egan,

by way of explanation, "and his father is captain of that boat."

It would seem, from this, that Egan did not wave his hat to draw the Magpie's attention to Barr's big gun, but simply to return the salute that had been given him by his friend, Bob Hart ; but still the police-boat came in and took charge of the gun, because Bob, or somebody else, told the officer in command what it was that Egan and Curtis were holding in their hands. We may add, too, that Egan did not say one word to arouse suspicion against Enoch. The latter had done that long ago, by allowing himself to be so often seen in Barr's company.

After the big gun had been taken on board the Magpie, and Enoch had gone back to report the matter to the man in the sink-boat, Egan and his guests resumed their search for the shore birds. They found them at last, and they proved so tame that Don wouldn't fire at them at all, declaring that he would just as soon go into Mr. Egan's barn-yard and shoot chickens. He would find quite as much sport in it ; but Hopkins, who wasn't thinking of sport, but of a good dinner, banged away as often as the opportunity was pre-

sented, and at the end of half an hour had filled his game-bag.

When Enoch made his unsuccessful attempt to give the Sallie up to the mercy of the elements, Egan and his friends, having passed an hour or two very pleasantly in the parlor with music and social converse, were assembled in their room, listening to the roaring of the wind and the beating of the sleet against the windows, while they discussed various plans for the following day. The report of Sam's musket brought them to their feet and sent them down stairs at headlong speed. In the yard they found Mr. Egan, who was looking anxiously around, half expecting to see some of his buildings in flames.

"Barr is at work already," said he, as the boys came out. "He is going to pay you off for meddling with that big gun of his."

"Well, if he will only settle with me and let your property alone, I don't care," replied Gus. "Sam was the fellow who gave the alarm. Let's go down and see what he shot at."

The boys were much relieved to find that Sam's vigilance had saved the cutter from harm, but they did not sleep very soundly that night. The

Sallie was the first thing that came into their minds when they awoke in the morning. They went aboard of her as soon as they were dressed, but could find nothing to indicate that any one had been near her during the night.

"I say, Sam," shouted Egan to the sentinel, who was getting ready to go ashore after his breakfast, "you must have been dreaming last night."

"Look a yer, Marse Gus," replied the negro, "if I dream dat I see a yarl go pas' yer las' night with three men in yer, de dogs done dream de same, kase dey growl, an' dat's what make me look ober de rail—yes, sah. Somebody was da' suah, kase I done seed 'em."

This was the day that Enoch and his party spent at the duck-shooter's cabin, but Egan and his party devoted it to glass-ball shooting in the forenoon, and to quail-shooting in the afternoon. This was done at the request of Walter Curtis, who had developed a remarkable fondness for quail on toast. The next day was to be given up to Hopkins, who was eager to secure a white swan, like the one which had led Egan that long race in his cutter, and that was why the latter suggested

a week's encampment on Spesutia Island. It would be little or no trouble for such a rifle-shot as Curtis to bring down a specimen now, Egan said, but if they waited until the upper end of the bay and its estuaries were frozen over, and the birds driven into the open water, it would be next to an impossibility to get a shot at one. Like all the wild fowl in Chesapeake Bay, they had learned how to calculate the range of a duck-gun, and knew enough to keep just beyond reach of it. When Enoch, Jones, and Lester sailed by on their way home from the duck-shooter's cabin, Egan's party was getting ready to start for the island. If Barr had stayed at home, or if the Sallie had kept away from Conesus Creek, Don Gordon would not have been shanghaied ; but Barr was so anxious to put in another good night's work among the ducks before he received a second visit from the police, and so very much afraid that the Magpie might intercept him while he was on his way to the creek, that he thought it best to get as close to his shooting-ground as he could before dark. The boys reached the creek before he did, and frightened away the ducks. Although he was at least three miles distant when it happened,

Barr saw the flock as it arose from the water, and the way he stamped about the deck of his sloop, and threatened vengeance upon those who had spoiled his night's work for him, was fearful. Half an hour later he picked up Pete, who, now that there was nothing to keep him longer in the creek, had started for home.

"Who done it?" demanded Barr, as he assisted his partner to haul his canoe aboard the sloop.

"Who do you 'spose?" growled Pete, in reply. "It was nobody but that oneasy Gus Egan and the fellers what's stopping at his house. They tried to make me believe that they didn't go for to skeer the ducks, but that they was after some swans they had seen a little furdur up the bay."

Barr was furious when he learned that Egan had been prowling around again just at the wrong time, and without knowing what he was going to do when he got there, he filled away for the creek, declaring, with much flourishing of his fists, that he would square yards with Egan before he saw the sun rise again.

About the time Barr left his cabin, Egan and his party were running into trouble without knowing it. They were going to spend a week in

camp, as we have said, their first object, of course, being to see all the sport they could ; and the second, to shoot swans enough so that each one of Egan's guests could take a specimen or two home with him. The cutter had not been under way more than half an hour, when Egan, whose eyes were everywhere, suddenly called out :

“There's a whiteness !”

“What's a whiteness ?” inquired Curtis, after he had looked all around without seeing anything.

“I should think you ought to know,” replied Hopkins, as he reached for the binoculars, which lay on the cushions near him. “Have you forgotten that once upon a time you told me that I was not much of a sportsman, because I spoke of a ‘flock’ of quails, when I should have said ‘covey’ ? I have since learned that you were wrong, as well as I. The word ‘covey’ is applied only to partridges ; and as there are no partridges in this country, it cannot properly be used.”

“What is the word, then ?” asked Curtis.

“Bevy,” answered Hopkins.

“Now, what's the use of splitting hairs ?” ex-

claimed Egan. "You seldom hear those terms used, even by our best educated sportsmen."

"I am not ignorant of that fact ; but I insist that Curtis shall be right himself, before he sets himself up for a teacher. A 'whiteness,' my dear fellow," said Hopkins, blandly, "is a flock of swans. Just cast your eye about two points off the starboard bow, and you will see them."

The boys looked in the direction indicated, and saw a large flock of birds about two or three miles away ; and, what was very singular, they appeared to be floating in the air, a few feet above the surface of the water, and not in the water itself. The clear, pure atmosphere must have served as a magnifying-glass, for they looked larger than the huge retriever which Egan had brought with him.

"How big would an ostrich look at that distance, and under the same conditions ?" asked Bert, after they had all taken a survey of the flock through the binoculars.

"As big as an elephant," answered Hopkins. "Now, the next thing is something else. How are we going to get a shot at them ?"

"That's the hardest part of it," replied Egan.

“They are the shyest birds in the world, and they can tell the difference between a rifle and a gunshot as well as you can ; at least that is what you will say after you have hunted them a few times. We can’t get within range of them with a boat—they are much too smart to allow that—so we will hide the cutter in a creek I know of, a little distance above here, and take to the marshes on foot. The one who is the best at creeping through cold water that is anywhere from six inches to two feet deep, is the one who will stand the best chance of getting a shot at them.”

It was while he was trying to find a hiding-place for his cutter that Egan, to his no small amazement, ran into and frightened away Barr’s ducks. We say he ran into them, and that is what any one living in that country would have said ; but the words must not be taken literally. The mouth of the creek was in reality a bay, about two miles wide and half as deep, and the middle of this bay was black with ducks. With a great splashing of water and fluttering of wings they took flight the instant the Sallie showed her nose around the point, so that the boys did not really come within rifle-shot of them. Egan and

his companions watched them as they winged their way toward the open water, and finally Don said :

“What a chance that would have been for Barr to-night, if he had known they were here !”

“Don’t you suppose he knew it ?” inquired Egan. “Of course he did. He makes it his business to keep posted on such matters, and unless I am very much mistaken, we shall hear from him or his partner before we get a pop at those swans. What did I tell you ?” he added, an hour later, as the cutter was running down the shore of the bay toward the creek. “There’s Pete, now.”

The others looked in the direction toward which Egan inclined his head, and saw a man pushing a canoe out of the marsh. He shook his paddle at them as they passed, and called out, in angry tones :

“Are you ever going to learn to mind your own business, Gus Egan ? You are always around when you are not wanted.”

“That’s what Barr told me the other day,” replied Egan, pleasantly. “But if the ducks will persist in bunching where I want to go, I don’t see how I can keep from scaring them away.”

"I was just getting ready to set out my decoys, and you have cheated me out of a day's wages," continued Pete.

"I am sorry for that, but I didn't know they were here," said Egan. "I ran in to get a shot at some swans we saw up the bay. That story about the decoys is too thin, altogether," he added; in a lower tone. "Ducks don't decoy when they are bunched, but only when they are flying. If we hadn't run in here Barr would have come up tonight with his big gun, and there would have been another slaughter of the innocents."

The presence of the duck-shooter was a warning to Egan that he had better make sure work in hiding his cutter, or else leave a strong force to guard her; and as he did not want to forego the pleasure of a shot at the swans himself, or ask any of his friends to do it, he ran as far into the creek as the wind would carry him, and made the Sallie fast to a couple of trees that grew close to the water's edge. This being done, the canoe was brought into requisition. It was pushed through the heavy grass until solid ground was reached, and then the young wild-fowlers began their weary work of stalking the swans. After Egan

had warned them that they would surely get lost if they were not careful to keep their bearings, they separated, and in less than two minutes after leaving the canoe they were out of sight and hearing of one another. Each one decided for himself which way he ought to go to find the game, and made the best speed he could in that direction, regardless of any obstacles that lay in his path. Don made exceedingly bad work of it. His knowledge of wood-craft was by no means insignificant, but he had never before traveled through a wilderness of reeds and grass ; and as there was literally nothing by which he could direct his course, he became bewildered, and, like every one else in a similar predicament, he began grumbling at the sun for being in the wrong quarter of the heavens.

“The sun was just about at meridian when we tied up in the creek,” he soliloquized, “and he ought, by rights, to be setting towards the west ; but instead of that, he is going north. I’ll not trust him, for I am sure that Chesapeake Bay lies off in this direction.”

So saying, he turned and went as straight away from it as he could go. He plunged headlong

through the thick grass and reeds, paying no heed to the severe scratches his hands and face received, floundered through water that was waist deep, and at the end of half an hour drew up before a little negro cabin, his advent being welcomed by two fierce dogs, which would certainly have laid hold of him had it not been for his double-barrel. They knew there was death in the black muzzles he turned toward them, and so kept at a respectful distance. Their angry barks and growls brought the owner of the cabin to the door. He was a thick-set, ruffianly-looking man, and when Don's gaze rested on him he told himself that it was a lucky thing for him that he had not come in there without a gun.

"Hallo, uncle," said he, cheerfully. "Where am I?"

"Whar is you?" repeated the negro, in sullen tones.

"Yes. I want to find my way to the bay; in which direction shall I go? There's a dollar for you. Perhaps that will loosen your tongue," said Don, who saw that the negro didn't care to talk to him. He did not even thank him for the coin

which fell at his feet ; but he picked it up and said, as he pointed to a well-beaten path that led into the reeds :

“ Go dat a way, an’ hit’ll take you plumb to de bay. Don’t turn to de right han’ nor to de lef’, kase if you do, you’ll get los’ suah. An’ don’t come hyar no mo’, nudder.”

“ I won’t,” replied Don. “ That man has been up to something,” he said to himself, as he shouldered his gun and hurried along the path. “ If he is hiding there to escape arrest, I am glad that I am in no danger of being called upon to serve a warrant on him, for he looks to me like a bad darkey.”

While Don was trying hard to convince himself that the path he was following led toward the bay, and not directly away from it, he was hurrying forward at his best pace. The path was very crooked, for it kept to the high ground all the way, and the turns in it were many and abrupt. As he ran around one of these turns, he came face to face with a couple of men who were making equally good time in the opposite direction ; that is, they were going toward the cabin Don had just left. He was so close upon them that if they had

not stopped on the instant, as he did, he and the foremost man would have run against each other. The surprise on both sides was great. One of the men turned part way around, as if he had a good mind to take to his heels, while the other, quickly recovering himself, laid hold of Don's gun with both hands. Then the boy began to believe that he was going to see trouble. He took a second look at the repulsive face that was scarcely more than a foot away from his own, and recognized in it the features of Barr, the professional big-gunner.

Did the latter recognize him also, and did he mean to punish him for being on board the cutter when she frightened away the ducks?

"Look here," said Don, without the least tremor in his voice, "I'll trouble you to let go my gun. What do you intend to do? I know who you are, and——"

"And I know who you are, too," interrupted Barr; and there was something in the way he uttered the words which made Don see very plainly that he might as well prepare for the worst. "You are one of the chaps who runs around with Gus Egan, taking the bread out of

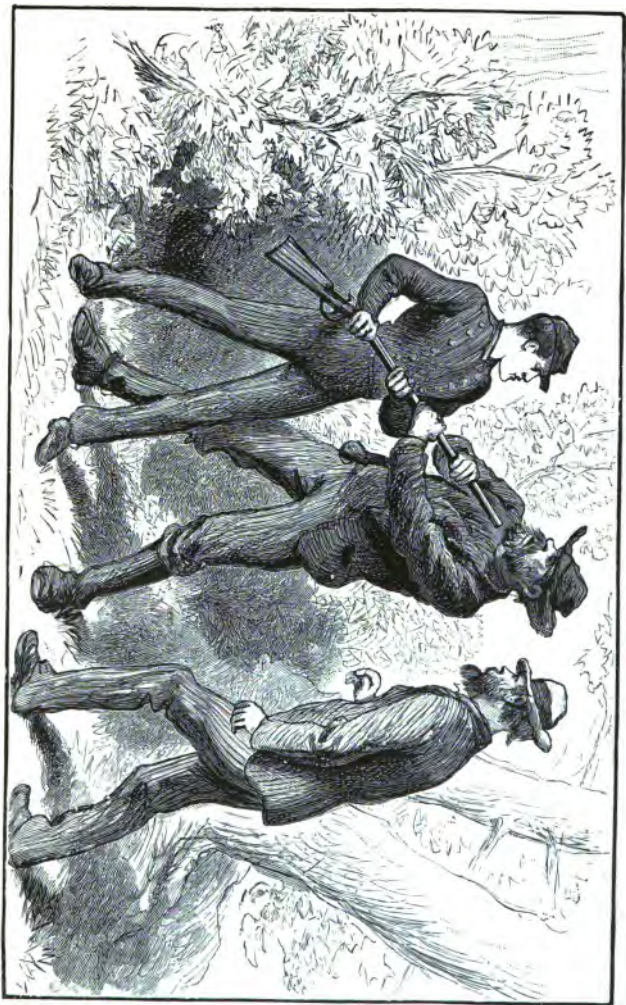
poor men's mouths—dog-gone you ; that's who you be. Your name's Gordon, ain't it ? ”

“ What's that to you ? ” replied Don. “ Let go my gun ! ”

“ Yes, I reckon you're the feller I've been looking for,” continued Barr, “ and I'm going to put you where you won't never bother hard-working men who are trying to make an honest living.”

The duck-shooter had been a little uncertain as to the boy's identity, but the way Don answered his question, set all his fears at rest. When he seized the gun he did not know who it was that was confronting him. Like all guilty men, he was easily startled, and Don's sudden and wholly unexpected appearance frightened him almost out of his wits ; but when he found that his path had been blocked by a boy and not by a police-officer, his courage came back to him, and he was about to let go his hold upon the double-barrel, when Lester Brigham's hasty words came into his mind. When he told Don that he was about to put him where he would never again trouble hard-working men who were trying to make an honest living, he made a sudden effort to twist the gun out of his

DON IN THE HANDS OF THE DUCK-SHOOTERS.





grasp ; but, to his intense amazement, he found himself jerked clear off the ground and thrown headlong into the reeds and out of the path, where the water was two feet deep. Turning the butt of his weapon to the front, Don rushed upon Pete, intending to knock him out of his way and take to his heels ; but that move was fatal to him. Pete was quicker than Barr, and besides, he was on the alert. Like a flash he dodged the vicious blow which Don aimed at his face, and springing up again under his guard, struck him, with stunning force, on the head, felling him to the ground. His gun dropped from his hands, and he lay so still where he had fallen that Barr, who was in a towering rage when he crawled out of the water, grew frightened while he looked at him.

“I’ll jest tell you what’s a fact, Pete,” said he.
“You whacked him too hard.”

“No, I reckon not,” answered the other.
“Ketch hold of him, and we’ll souse him in the water and bring him to life again. Them thousand dollars are our’n.”

Barr was a coward as well as a professional law-breaker, and if he had been alone he would have

fled at the top of his speed, leaving Don to recover or to remain insensible, as the fates might decree ; but Peter wasn't that sort. Barr had told him of the money that Lester Brigham was willing to give to any one who would send Don so far out of the country that he would never come back again ; and Pete didn't see why they should not earn it, now that it was in their power to do so. In accordance with his suggestion, Barr took hold of one foot while Pete held fast to the other, and by their united efforts, Don was pushed out of the path and churned up and down in the cold water, until he began to show signs of returning consciousness. Then he was hauled up again, feet first, Pete threw him over his shoulder as if he had been an infant, and the worthy pair retraced their steps toward the beach.

Don had a dim idea of what was going on, but he was powerless to resist. His head felt as if it were about to burst, his strength was all gone ; but in courage he was as undaunted as ever. He knew when he was put into Barr's canoe and taken off to the sloop, which lay at anchor a short distance from the shore ; and he heard, as in a dream, his abductors talk about shipping him off

for Cuba on a coaster that was to sail from Havre de Grace that night; but for reasons of their own, which Don could not understand, owing to the fuddled state of his brain, they were going to make Brigham believe that they had sent him off to China. This gave the prisoner a vague idea that he was the victim of a plot, but he did not try to get at the bottom of it. On the contrary, he fell asleep while his captors were lifting him over the side of the sloop.

When Don awoke it was dark, and he was lying on a rough bunk in the sloop's cabin. Barr was standing at the top of the companion-ladder in such a position that he could keep an eye on Don, and at the same time listen to the conversation that was carried on between Pete and a man whom Don could not see.

"It's a business that I don't like to meddle with," Don heard the invisible man say.

"'Tain't no wuss than other things that you've done more'n a hundred times," answered Pete. "He's a teetotal stranger in these parts, and not one of his friends knows where he is. You can sign the articles for him, and sw'ar that he was shipped all squ'ar and reg'lar, can't you? If you

don't want to bring him back from Havanny, why, you needn't to."

"But my bunks in the forecastle are all full," said the voice. "Where can I stow him?"

"Put him in the cabin till you call him up for duty, and arterwards let him stow himself o' nights," said Pete. "If you don't do it, who'll ketch your cigars for this trip?"

"Well, I suppose I shall have to do it," replied the voice, which belonged to the captain of a coaster, who now and then turned a penny in the line of smuggling. "Bring him aboard."

Pete at once came down the ladder, and Don, who, during his sleep, had been bound so tightly with ropes that he could not move hand or foot, was carried to the deck and hoisted aboard the coaster. The mate, who came to the side at that moment, was informed, in response to his inquiries, that Don was a sailor-man, who had signed the articles all right and square, but had made up his mind, at the last moment, that he didn't want to go to Havana.

"Tried to desert, did he?" said the mate, with a grim smile. "I'll make him wish he hadn't before this run is over. You didn't knock him

dead, did you? I see he's got a fearful bump over his eye."

Pete hastened to assure the mate that Don would be all right by the time his services were required on deck, and then he and Barr carried him into the cabin and tumbled him into one of the bunks.

CHAPTER XVII.

CONCLUSION.

DON'S senses were by this time pretty well restored, and he was able to think the situation over calmly. He had read enough to know that it is no uncommon thing for shipping agents, when seamen are scarce, to kidnap landsmen, and thrust them into a ship's fore-castle to do duty as sailors ; and he knew, too, that these "shanghaied men," as they are called, are sometimes absent for so long a period that their friends on shore mourn them as dead. But Don was well aware that he had not been kidnapped because sailors were scarce. He had heard Lester Brigham's name mentioned in connection with some money that was to be paid to Barr, and he knew whom he had to thank for the trouble he had got into.

"But what have I done to Lester that he

should take this way of being revenged upon me?" Don asked himself, in deep perplexity. "I am sure that I have always treated him as well as he would let me, and it is not my fault that I can't be friends with him. But if he thinks he has seen the last of me, he will find that he is very much mistaken. I have been in many a tight place, first and last, but somehow I generally manage to get out not very much the worse for my experience."

But his prospects for getting out of this scrape were not very bright, as Don found when he came to make the attempt to free himself from his bonds. Pete and Barr had done their work well, and with all his tugging and pulling the prisoner could not loosen the ropes in the least. After a few vain efforts he ceased his exertions, and waited with as much patience as he could to see what was going to happen. He could hear the footsteps of the crew above his head and the bumping of the bales and boxes as they were lowered into the hold, and he knew when the order was given to get the schooner under way. Then Don began to nerve himself for a desperate attempt at escape. If the captain ordered

him on deck before the shores of Maryland were out of sight, he would do it at the risk of losing one of his crew. As it happened, he did do it before his vessel had left the pier a quarter of a mile behind. By the time he came down the ladder to release his captive, the latter had made up his mind just how to act.

“Well, my hearty,” said the skipper, who looked enough like Barr to be his brother, “are you ready to turn to now?”

“Ay ay, sir,” replied Don.

“I suppose you don’t remember of shipping aboard my vessel and signing the articles, do you?” continued the captain, who was surprised at Don’s prompt and sailor-like answer. He had looked for a storm of threats and protests, but he was not prepared for this ready surrender on the part of the shanghaied boy. It had just the effect upon him that Don intended it should have. It threw him off his guard, and rendered it comparatively easy for him to carry out the plans he had formed.

“No, sir, I don’t remember that I have ever been aboard this craft before,” said Don.

“I can show you your name on the articles,

all fair and ship-shape, if you want to see it," remarked the skipper, as he proceeded to untie the ropes with which Don was confined. "What have you done with the advance I paid you?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Of course you don't. The next time you get a few dollars in your pockets for ballast, keep a clear head on your shoulders by steering wide of grog-shops. Now, then, tumble up and turn to. Go for'ard and——"

The captain suddenly paused, for he was talking to the empty air. He had unwittingly allowed Don, who was stretching his arms and legs to limber up his muscles, to get between him and the open window in the stern, and the last the captain saw of him, he was sailing through that window like a bird on the wing. He heard a loud splash, and by the time he could get to the stern and look out, there was nothing but a bubble or two on the surface of the water to show where Don had disappeared.

Among the many ways that the academy boys had of amusing themselves, and of which we never before had occasion to speak, were private theatricals, which were given in the presence of

the faculty and all the students. During the last term the members of the first class had produced the pantomime called "The Golden Egg," with Don Gordon, who was by long odds the best gymnast in school, as the Harlequin. If you have ever seen this pantomime played, you will remember that one of the things the Harlequin has to do is to dive through a window, placed about the height of his shoulders from the floor of the stage, his fall being broken by a blanket held by ten or a dozen people on the other side of the scenes. The ease and grace with which Don performed this difficult feat always called forth rounds of applause from the students, who would have been astonished if any one had told them that the Harlequin's agility would one day be of real service to him. The assiduous practice which had enabled him to perform his part so creditably on the academy stage, stood him in hand now. While the captain of the coaster was talking to him, Don bounded from the floor like a rubber ball, went through that window without ever touching the sides of it, and disappeared in the water under the stern.

Knowing that instant pursuit would be made,

the boy wasted no time in trying to hide. He believed that the very first place the captain would look for him would be under the pier, so he kept away from it, swimming under water as long as he could hold his breath, and striking out for the middle of the bay the instant he arose to the surface. As soon as he thought it safe to do so, he stopped long enough to pull off some of his clothing, and after that he made better headway. He knew when the sailors tumbled into the yawl, and he saw Pete and Barr when they pushed their canoe out from the shadow of the pier and joined in the pursuit. When he caught sight of the Firefly bearing down upon him, he felt a thrill of exultation. He had never doubted that he should escape if he got a fair chance to make the attempt, and now he was positive that that coaster would not take him to Cuba. He recognized the schooner, and knew that if he could make Enoch hear him, his escape was assured. Enoch had never been a friend of his, but Don knew that in a case like this he would fight for him as long as he had strength enough to stand on his feet. By doing some of his best swimming he succeeded in crossing the

schooner's bows, and then he hailed her in tones just loud enough to reach the ears of the boys he saw on her deck, but *not* loud enough to show his pursuers where he was. The second hail pointed out his position, and brought him the rope by which he was hauled on board the Firefly.

This was the substance of the story that Don told Jones and Enoch as he sat in the cock-pit, while the latter was steering his vessel off through the dark to get away from the coaster. The only portions of it he omitted were those that related to Lester Brigham's complicity in his abduction. He thought his rescuers knew nothing about it, and he did not mean that they should hear of it from him. Bert was the only one he would ever take into his confidence. There were no secrets between him and Bert now.

"You have had a time of it, that's a fact," said Enoch, when Don paused. "I have often heard of men being shanghaied and made to do duty as foremast hands, but this is the first instance of the kind that ever came under my personal observation. Your Harlequin business came in good play, didn't it?"

"Who is it that says that every bit of knowl-

edge we possess will be of use to us some day, if we only wait long enough?" said Don, in reply. "I know that little things I have picked up at odd times, have often come handy to me."

"If I were in your place, I would make that captain smart for this night's work," Jones remarked.

It was right on the point of Don's tongue to answer that he couldn't do it without making others smart also; but he caught his breath in time, and said:

"It would be too much bother. By the time he gets back, I hope to be in Mississippi; and if I should have him arrested, I should have to come all the way to Maryland to testify against him. By the way, what did Pete mean, when he said that if the captain didn't take me, there would be no one to pick up his cigars when he returned?"

"Aha!" exclaimed Enoch. "So Barr is in that business, is he? I'll tell you what he meant: Barr's family and Pete's live in Havre de Grace, but the men themselves spend the most of their time in a little shanty down here on the beach. When that schooner returns from Cuba, she will

make it a point to pass that shanty in the night, even if she has to lie over somewhere, in order to do it. When she goes by, the captain will throw overboard a few thousand cigars, done up in water-proof packages, and Barr and his partner will take charge of them until the skipper sees a chance to sell them without paying the duty."

"Oh, he's a smuggler in a small way, is he? Well, who was that darkey whose dogs were so determined to make a meal of me?"

"He's a petty thief—a robber of hen-roosts and smoke-houses, and there are those who believe that he has been guilty of worse things than that. But if he found your gun he will give it up. He wouldn't dare keep it."

Don drew a long breath of relief when he heard this. He had been mourning over the loss of the weapon, ever since he came to his senses. He would not have parted with it for many times its value, for he was too fond of the father who gave it to him.

When Enoch had run so far up the bay that he thought there was no more danger to be apprehended from the coaster, he came about and laid a course for Mr. Egan's house, off which he arrived

just as the first gray streaks of dawn were seen in the east. Early as it was, Egan and the rest were astir. They had passed a sleepless night, and were making ready to start out in the Sallie to resume their search for Don Gordon. The actions of the Firefly, which came toward her with all sails set as if she meant to run the cutter down, attracted their attention, and Egan, with some nervousness in his manner, turned his glass upon her. He held it to his eyes for a moment, and then threw his hat up toward the cross-trees and uttered a deafening whoop.

“Didn’t I tell you that if Enoch found him he would stay by him?” he shouted, gleefully. “Don has certainly been somewhere, for he has Enoch’s coat and hat on.”

The glass was passed rapidly from hand to hand, and the rescued boy, after returning Egan’s welcoming yell with interest, stood with his hat by his side, striking what Curtis called “stunning attitudes,” so that all his friends had a different view of him. His long swim had not washed any of his love of fun out of him.

As the Firefly drew nearer she began hauling down her sails, one after the other, and Hopkins

caught the rope that Jones threw to the Sallie. Long before any of the lookers-on thought that the little vessels were within jumping distance of each other, Don cleared the gap between them by a tremendous leap, and landed in Bert's arms.

"Enoch, we shall never forget you for this," said Egan, who knew instinctively that Don had something startling to tell.

"Oh, that's all right," replied Enoch, who, nevertheless, was highly delighted over what he had done. The boy he had befriended was able to surround him and Jones with good influences, and make it comparatively easy for them to hold to the resolutions of amendment they had made. "I guess Don would have done as much for us if he had been in our place and we in his. Cast off that line, please."

"What for?" demanded Egan.

"We had better be getting along toward home," replied Enoch. "We've been out all night, and as the breeze has been rather fresh, the folks may be worrying about us. Besides we haven't had any breakfast yet."

"Not much you won't go home until we are

done with you," said Egan. "The fresh breeze will not alarm your people, because they know that you are too good a sailor to get into trouble with a cap-full of wind. As to breakfast, we haven't had any, either. We brought it aboard, intending to eat it while we were looking for Don. Come over and take a bite with us, while we listen to what Don has to say for himself."

As much as Enoch and Jones desired to be received as friends by the cutter's crew, they would have been glad to postpone all intimacy with them for a day or two, at least. The fact was, they were ashamed of themselves; but they didn't see how they could refuse to accept Egan's invitation. Accordingly a rope-fender was dropped over the Firefly's rail to keep the little vessels from chafing each other as they bobbed up and down on the waves, and Jones and Enoch clambered over into the cutter's cock-pit.

"Don tells us that Brigham has gone home," said Egan, as he passed a well-filled plate to each of his new guests. "What started him off in so great a hurry?"

Enoch repeated his stereotyped story about Lester having heard bad news and being home-

sick and all that, and there was not the least sign on Don Gordon's face to indicate that he knew better. He admired Enoch for his loyalty to his friend, and Enoch and his companion admired the cutter's crew for the very temperate language they used when speaking of the absent boy. Every one of them, except Bert, had seen the time when they would most gladly have improved an opportunity to punch his head, but they had nothing but kind words for him behind his back. Enoch told himself that the good-will of such fellows was worth working for.

The story to which the boys listened while they were disposing of the good things Egan's mother had put up for them, was the same in substance as the one we have already related, all reference to Lester Brigham and his responsibility in the matter, being omitted. The cutter's crew were mad enough to fight when Don pushed up his hat and showed them the lump on his forehead which had been raised there by Pete's hard fist, and even Bert bristled up like a bantam on the war-path. The surest way to make him angry was to do something to Don. They all agreed that there could be nothing done about the matter unless

Don were willing to stay and prosecute every one who had a hand in kidnapping him ; but Don couldn't do that without bringing Lester into trouble, and all he had to say about it was, that he was satisfied to get off without going to Cuba. He was among friends again, and that was all he cared for. Pete hadn't hurt him any to speak of. He was sorry he had lost his gun, but perhaps——

“But perhaps you haven't lost it,” said Egan, finishing the sentence for him. “In fact, I know you haven't. We found it this morning leaning against the door of the boat-house, where that chicken-thief left it last night. Whether or not he knew what happened to you, I can't say ; but I do know that when he discovered the gun, he made all haste to return it, for fear that we might look for it and so run on to his hiding-place.”

“That's the best piece of news I have heard in a long time,” exclaimed Don. “But how does it come that that darkey knew where to leave it? He never saw me before.”

“Don't you believe it. He knows everything that goes on around here as well as Barr does.

Now, boys," said the ex-sergeant, "I should like to ask you a few questions which I would not have asked you under any consideration while I was a member of the academy ; but don't answer them unless you can do so without violating anybody's confidence. How did you learn about our plans? You must have known all about them, or you could not have managed matters with so much skill."

"Jones and I were hidden in the recitation room when you held your business meeting," replied Enoch. "I mean on the night that Blake and his committee presented their report."

"Why, Enoch!" exclaimed Hopkins, who was fairly staggered by this revelation. "Didn't you know that by doing that you put yourselves in the way of the best kind of a thrashing?"

"We did, but we took our chances. Now, I want to ask *you* a question: Did we shut the door of that lodge-room against ourselves by playing the part of spies?"

"Of course not," answered Egan, promptly. "You didn't hear anything, and you never will until you have traveled—so and so."

Here Egan made several motions with his

hands, only one of which was intended to mean something ; but which one that was, nobody but a first-class boy could have told.

“Now clear up another point,” continued Egan. “Did Bob Endicott’s father know what base uses his carriage was going to be put to that day ? ”

“No, sir,” said Enoch, with a laugh. “Bob told him that he wanted the carriage, and his father let him have it ; but he did not know what was going to be done with it. Bob was sharp enough to keep that to himself. He gave Sam and the footman five dollars apiece for what they did.”

“And they earned the money,” observed Curtis. “Blake and his committee had a fearful time finding their way out of the woods, and Mr. Colson said that when they came into his office they looked like a lot of tramps. It was a sharp trick, Enoch, and no one but you could have managed it.”

“And no one but Lester Brigham would have thought of it in the first place,” said Egan.

From this it would appear that Lester’s secrets were not likely to be revealed. Huggins could

not say that it was he who suggested to Lester the idea of running off with a private yacht, for he had left school long ago ; and Ross dared not tell that he was the one who planned the stealing of the class dinner, for he was afraid that he would be court-martialed and punished if he did. Lester's other secret was in the keeping of boys who knew how to hold their tongues.

When the breakfast had been disposed of, and the exciting and amusing incidents that happened during their last term at the academy, as well as the events of the previous night, had been thoroughly discussed, Egan and his party got into the canoe and pushed off for shore, to let Mr. and Mrs. Egan see that the missing boy had come back safe and sound, while Enoch and Jones went aboard the Firefly and set sail for home. In accordance with his promise, Enoch wrote to Lester that very day. After telling him how Don Gordon had escaped from the coaster, he wound up his letter as follows :

“ We have not seen Barr since his failure to overhaul us after Don had been taken on board the Firefly, and I don't think he will ever trouble you. There are too many things against him that

he wouldn't like to have brought to light in a court of law. Don knows nothing whatever of your complicity in his abduction, and you may be sure that we shall not enlighten him. We hope to see you next term, but we tell you plainly that if you have any more schemes for mischief in your head, you can keep them there, or look to somebody besides Jones and me to help you carry them out. We are tired of playing the part of scamps and law-breakers, and are going to see how boys feel who honestly try to behave themselves. It will be a novel experience to us, but we hope to live through it. We are friends with all Egan's party now, and they have invited us to join them in their hunts and pleasure-rides. They didn't throw any fatherly advice at our heads, but we have as good evidence as we want that they will stand by us and help us all they can."

It was wonderful what a change that breakfast on board the cutter made in Enoch and his friend Jones. After that they were seen in Egan's company almost every day, and the officers of the Magpie, who had more than once told themselves that Enoch would bear watching, began to think that they had been greatly mistaken in him. He

and Jones had been brought to their senses in the same way that Don Gordon was. The influence that Egan and his friends exerted over them was a silent one, but it was none the less powerful. They often went sailing and hunting together, and Enoch's skill as a wing-shot enabled him to present Bert Gordon with one of the largest and finest swans that had ever been killed on the bay. They did not get a shot on the day that Don was lost in the marshes (it was probable that Barr's sloop frightened the birds away), but they afterward had fine sport with the swans, and every one of Egan's guests took a specimen home with him.

Affairs went smoothly after that, and the boys who have been spoken of in this book as THE YOUNG WILD-FOWLERS were happy—all except Lester Brigham. He was as miserable as a boy ever gets to be. When Don was a prisoner, and in danger of being sent off to some distant port, Lester's terror almost drove him frantic; but as soon as he learned that Don had come safely out of his troubles, that Enoch and Jones had been at hand to assist him when he made that bold "Swim for Liberty," and that through his influ-

ence and Egan's, his sworn friends had been led to desert him and to resolve to mend their ways—when Lester knew all these things, his fear gave way to rage, intense and bitter. To repeat the expression Enoch Williams once made, he could not have been more alone in the world if he had been set down on Robinson Crusoe's island, before the man Friday made his appearance. Bert could hardly believe his ears when his brother told him that it was Lester who put Barr up to do as he did, and he threatened to expose him in spite of the pledge of secrecy he had given; but Don promised to duck him in the bay if he did, and so Bert said nothing, although he stormed a good deal.

The boys were sorry to say good-bye to their genial host, but they were eager to start for home. Christmas was coming, and it was a gala day with all of them. Don and Bert enjoyed it, as they always did, but they afterward told each other that no Christmas had ever seemed quite like this one. They took solid comfort in looking back over the year that had just passed. Their record was a clear one, and Don was happy in the thought that he had never caused his mother a

moment's anxiety since Egan, Hopkins and Curtis got hold of him. They never got a glimpse of Lester Brigham, and neither did he go back to school with them. His father, having learned that life on a plantation was not just what his imagination had pictured it, sold his property in Rochdale and removed to New Orleans, where Lester lives at this writing. Whether or not he took a high stand among the boys there, we don't know for certain, but we feel safe in saying that he did not. His future is easily predicted. To quote once more from Enoch, he is all talk and no *do*; and a boy who has that failing, is not likely to make much of a man.

It gives us great pleasure to say that Enoch and Jones held firmly to their good resolutions, in spite of all the temptations that came in their path, and that the influence that had been exerted upon them made itself felt, through them, upon other members of "the crowd," who gradually fell into their ways. During the term no boys worked harder than they did, and the result of the examination was just what the members of the first class said it would be. Enoch was made captain, and Jones won a first-sergeant's *chevrons*.

Don and Bert did not leave the academy at the close of the term, but remained to take the finishing course, which they will complete next year. What they will do after that they have not yet decided ; but it is safe to say that if they make truthfulness, fidelity and manliness their guiding-stars in the future, as they have in the past, they will be of some use in their day and generation.

Curtis is in a fair way to end his days in the regular army, and Enoch Williams, to whom he has written glowing accounts of his life at "The Point," is looking in the same direction, and longing for an opportunity to distinguish himself as one of his country's defenders. He has a fair prospect of going to West Point. If he is ever intrusted with a command, and exhibits the same generalship in battle that he did in carrying out Huggins's idea, and Ross's, he will certainly win a high place in his chosen profession.

Hopkins is studying law in Baltimore, and Egan is in South America building railroads ; but he is coming home next September, and has invited all his old friends, Enoch and Jones included, to meet him at his father's house. Don

is looking forward with impatience to a month's sport with the canvas-backs and red-heads, but he does not care to see Barr again, or to be the hero of another adventure like the one we have attempted to describe in **THE YOUNG WILD-FOWLERS.**

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